Commentary
December 1998

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Mary Eberstadt
Midge Decter

Thinking About the Unthinkable in the Middle East

Gabriel Schoenfeld

Science, Fraud & the Baltimore Case

Jeremy Bernstein

Dubinsky on the Loose—A Story

Joseph Epstein

Why We Love Van Gogh

Steven C. Munson

Salman Rushdie's Delusions, and Ours

Daniel Pipes

The Death of the Concert

Terry Teachout

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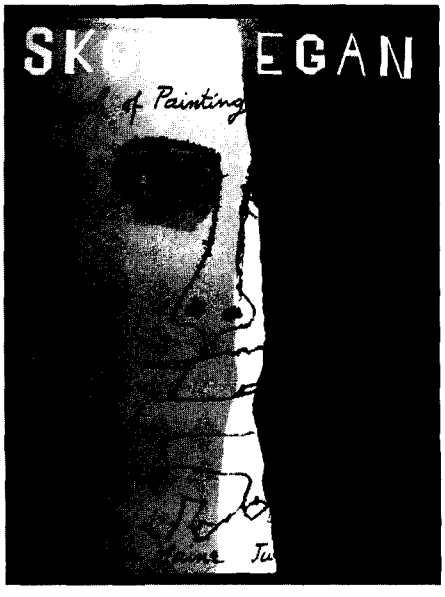

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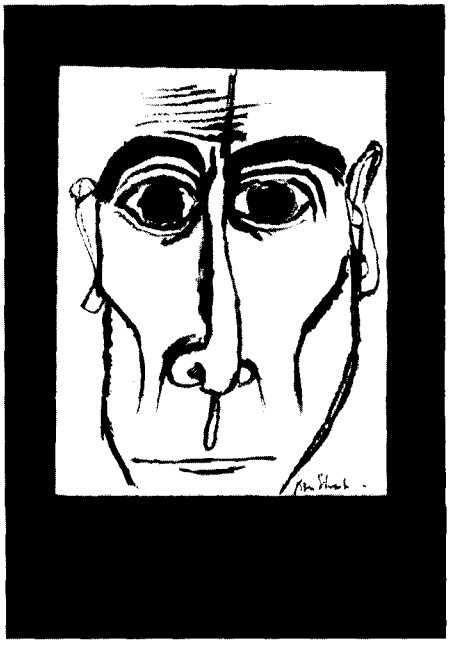

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Advertising Director Sarah M. Stern
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COMMENTARY (ISSN 0010-2601) is published monthly by the American Jewish Committee—EDITORIAL AND BUSINESS OFFICES: 165 East 56th Street, New York, NY 10022 Telephone: (212) 751-4000. Fax: (212) 751-1174. E-MAIL: Commentary@compuserve.com. Unsolicited manuscripts must be accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Letters intended for publication may be edited. Single copy is $4.50; $45 a year, 2 years $79, 3 years $109—Add $11.00 per year for all foreign subscriptions, including Canada and Latin America. For subscription information call: (800) 829-6270—Periodical postage paid at New York, NY and at additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to COMMENTARY, 165 East 56th Street, New York, NY 10022. Copyright © 1998 by the American Jewish Committee; all rights reserved under International and Pan American Copyright Conventions—Indexed in *Reader's Guide*, *Book Review Digest*, and elsewhere—Available in reference systems produced by University Microfilms International (800) 521-0600 and Information Access Company (800) 227-8431—U.S. Newsstand Distribution by Eastern News Distributors Inc., 1130 Cleveland Rd., Sandusky, OH 44870. Printed in the U.S.A.

COMMENTARY is a member of The Leadership Network, Teri Schure, Chairperson. (212) 375-1575; Fax (212) 982-6968.

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December 1998

Letters from Readers

Operation Tailwind

To the Editor:

Joshua Muravchik's article, "Nerve Gas, Lies, and Videotape" [September], professes to analyze the accuracy and impact of CNN's "Valley of Death," the report that I co-produced on Operation Tailwind during the Vietnam war. Mr. Muravchik cavalierly casts me and my fellow CNN producer, Jack Smith, as liars whose work lacks basic fairness, balance, and perspective. He himself, however, fails in this regard, ignoring the first tenet of journalism, which is to speak with a source you are writing about. Mr. Muravchik never contacted me or Jack Smith to allow us even the pretense of defending ourselves against the false charges.

In addition, Mr. Muravchik attacks our segment without having had access either to the thousands of pages of reporting or to the confidential sources that buttress it. Nor does he try to fill in the gaps. He simply echoes the line of the cursory report by Floyd Abrams and David Kohler, failing to note its superficialities or that Kohler, CNN's general counsel, had cleared the "Valley of Death" Tailwind segment in the first place. It would seem obvious to any objective, disinterested analyst that the Abrams-Kohler "investigation," conducted by a hired gun and a company executive, was meant to clear CNN corporate management of responsibility, hanging the lower-level producers out to dry.

Besides being tilted itself, Mr. Muravchik's analysis contains numerous errors. Among them:

• Mr. Muravchik asserts that "Admiral [Thomas] Moorer, for example, flatly denied authorizing the use of sarin or possessing information of its use." On the contrary, Admiral Moorer read the script and the *Time* magazine article before our show was aired and gave it his explicit approval. After the broadcast, he reaffirmed three times, in the presence of both Jack Smith and myself, that he was aware that sarin had been used in Tailwind. He gave the producers a written statement clarifying that he learned of sarin's use *after* the mission, to underscore the point that it was not he who was personally responsible. Documents released by the Pentagon in July, however, prove that Admiral Moorer was regularly briefed on the progress of the Tailwind mission as it transpired. It should be noted that former Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird told the Associated Press the week after the Tailwind broadcast that a small amount of sarin had indeed been shipped into the Vietnam theater in 1967.

Mr. Muravchik commits a flagrant error by relying on the following exchange in the Abrams-Kohler report. "Producer: 'So you are aware sarin was used?' Moorer: 'I am not confirming for you it was used. You have told me that.'" What Mr. Muravchik fails to mention is that this exchange comes from my very first meeting with Admiral Moorer, *prior* to the on-camera interview Mr. Muravchik quotes earlier in the article, distorting its significance enormously. During that initial meeting, Admiral Moorer had not decided how much to cooperate with CNN, although even then it must be stressed that he never flatly denied the use of sarin. His hard confirmations came explicitly in the second, third, and fourth meetings.

• Contrary to Mr. Muravchik's assertions, Admiral Moorer explicitly told CNN *on-camera* that the objective of Tailwind was to find American defectors. In fact, he was the first source to admit this to CNN on the record.

In his initial on-camera interview, Admiral Moorer

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said, "I think one of the missions [of Tailwind] probably was to locate these people, evaluate the scope of their activity, and who is supporting them." He added that the objective was to locate the defectors but not necessarily to kill them. In the ensuing months of reporting, several sources asserted that Americans were not merely observed during Tailwind but killed, so we went back to Admiral Moorer. In an off-camera interview, he confirmed that defectors were indeed killed in Tailwind and that it was not the only mission of its kind. He justified Tailwind by saying that the group of defectors was so large that it would have risked too many American lives to try capturing them all.

• Despite Mr. Muravchik's statements, Lieutenant Robert Van Buskirk, a member of the Special Forces' "Studies and Observations Group" (SOG) and one of our on-camera sources, never said the words "repressed memory" to CNN producers. *Newsweek* reporter Evan Thomas has freely admitted that it was he who used those words, not Van Buskirk.

Starting with the first cold call from CNN, Van Buskirk repeated his account of killing a Caucasian in a village base camp during Tailwind. Under further inquiry, he revealed that the Caucasian was an American, not a Russian. He made this admission only after we had found four other reconnaissance personnel who told us they were sent into the area to scout for Americans.

Van Buskirk claims that in his original after-action report he wrote that he had killed an American, but that his colonel, Dan Shungle, destroyed that report, and told him to say the man was a Russian. It was common practice for the paper trail on these secret missions to be thoroughly sterilized so that the U.S. government would not later face any potential embarrassment. Even these soldiers' Silver Star citations say that the action took place in South Vietnam, not Laos.

Much has been made of Van Buskirk's character. For the record, Van Buskirk is an ordained Baptist minister who spends time as a volunteer preaching to inmates. He never tried to hide his earlier incarceration in Germany, for which all charges were dropped.

• Mr. Muravchik claims that it is a "fact" that SOG reconnaissance man Jay Graves was never on the Tailwind mission. But we checked Graves's presence on Tailwind with another SOG "recon" team leader, who placed him there. In addition, Graves gave CNN four hours of off-camera testimony and then another two hours of on-camera testimony, explicitly describing nearly every aspect of the Tailwind mission.

As with so many of our sources, Graves came under severe pressure after the broadcast for breaking his secrecy oath about this sensitive mission. He even received a death threat. He has now retreated into "plausible deniability."

• Mr. Muravchik also naively states that Tailwind veteran Jim Cathey could not have been on the mission because he was not a member of SOG. CNN's report states not that Cathey was in SOG but, as his records show, in the Air Force. Mr. Muravchik fails to explain that Tailwind was not a SOG mission but a combined mission of the Army, Air Force, and Marines. In addition, *none* of the veterans' service records suggests they were in Laos at the time, since the U.S. did not admit to fighting a war there.

• Mr. Muravchik appears not to have done his scientific homework. He flatly declares that "[s]arin is toxic through the skin" and implies that it kills anyone who comes into contact with it. Contrary to much of the disinformation about sarin, however, it is not deadly through the skin at temperatures in Laos. Gas masks like those the

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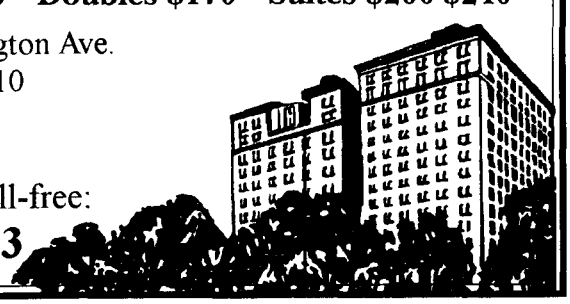

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SOG team was equipped with are all that is needed for protection. Sarin is also a nonpersistent gas, and can evaporate very quickly, leaving no trace. Mr. Muravchik appears to have mixed sarin up with the deadlier and more persistent nerve agent, VX.

• According to Mr. Muravchik, Jack Smith and I claim to have a new witness, replete with supporting documents, who journeyed from camp to camp inside Cambodia, zapping U.S. defectors with nerve gas. Such accusations may help make Oliver and Smith a laughingstock among their colleagues in broadcast news, but in truth they are hardly more far-fetched than the original Tailwind tale.

In fact, CNN has publicly confirmed the existence of the tape and transcript of this source, who was not in SOG but in another elite unit. The interview was conducted and produced not by Jack Smith and me but by a senior CNN investigative reporter and another producer. They spent hours with the source and have confirmed various elements of his story.

These and many other serious errors in Mr. Muravchik's article might not have been made had he researched the subject more carefully. Perhaps his unprofessional and one-sided disquisition will endear him to his military and ex-CIA sources. But it serves ultimately to expose his own gaps as a journalist.

Since the broadcast in June, attackers like Mr. Muravchik have sought to cast me as a Left-leaning producer driven by ideology to attack the military. Allow me to state that my one experience in politics was as a personal assistant to Lee Atwater during the Reagan-Bush campaign. I have worked for fifteen years in broadcasting, primarily at PBS and CNN, and have won some of broadcast journalism's highest awards, but have never been involved in a high-profile controversy. My extensive writings as a print journalist have been mostly about the birth of democracy and human rights in developing countries. I have never fabricated stories, or lied to obtain information, and am shocked to be accused of such things. I feel strongly that the Vietnam veterans I met during our research are extraordinarily brave, and fought courageously to defend America's freedoms. But the pursuit of truth is also a patriotic undertaking. I am still certain that in America the truth in its fullness will eventually and always be told.

APRIL OLIVER
Washington, D.C.

TO THE EDITOR:

Congratulations on the very thoughtful and well-researched article on the CNN nerve-gas story. Joshua Muravchik catches some absolutely fundamental points. The "Valley of Death" special report was not just sloppy journalism; it was much more egregious than that. Moreover, this was the third in a series of strongly biased, dishonest CNN reports on the military. CNN has a lot of work to do if it ever expects to regain a cordial and trusting relationship with the military.

The following is from a letter I sent to Tom Johnson, the CEO of CNN, six days after the "Valley of Death" special was aired and one day before I resigned from the network, having been its military analyst since 1991. It reflects my concerns then and my concerns today:

I think it is important to remind you, Tom, that there were two very special types of Air Force personnel in Southeast Asia. Their primary mission was to save lives of downed crewmen or of infiltration teams in great distress. They often took very great risks; many were shot down and killed. These two groups were the A-1 Sandies and Spads and the Jolly Greens. The only time I wept with joy during my 180 combat mis-

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sions was the moment that the Jollies and the Sandies rescued my leader who was shot down and badly wounded over Laos. The sergeant who went down on the jungle penetrator to recover him almost dropped him on the way back up—he was so slippery since he was soaked in blood.

. . . CNN has accused the most heroic of the heroic of using lethal gas to kill fellow Americans. The only analogy I can think of would be if CNN accused two Medal of Honor winners of extreme cowardice—it is that bad, Tom.

The most admired man in America [Colin Powell] has told you in strong terms how he feels. . . . Norman Schwarzkopf, [General Andrew] Goodpaster, and many other distinguished Americans have given me a similar message—the story is wrong in all dimensions. . . . I am hearing from many people both within and without CNN the word "shameful" when people express their outrage about this shabby work.

Watching a great organization self-destruct is sad indeed. It is not too late to turn this whole situation around but time is running out fast.

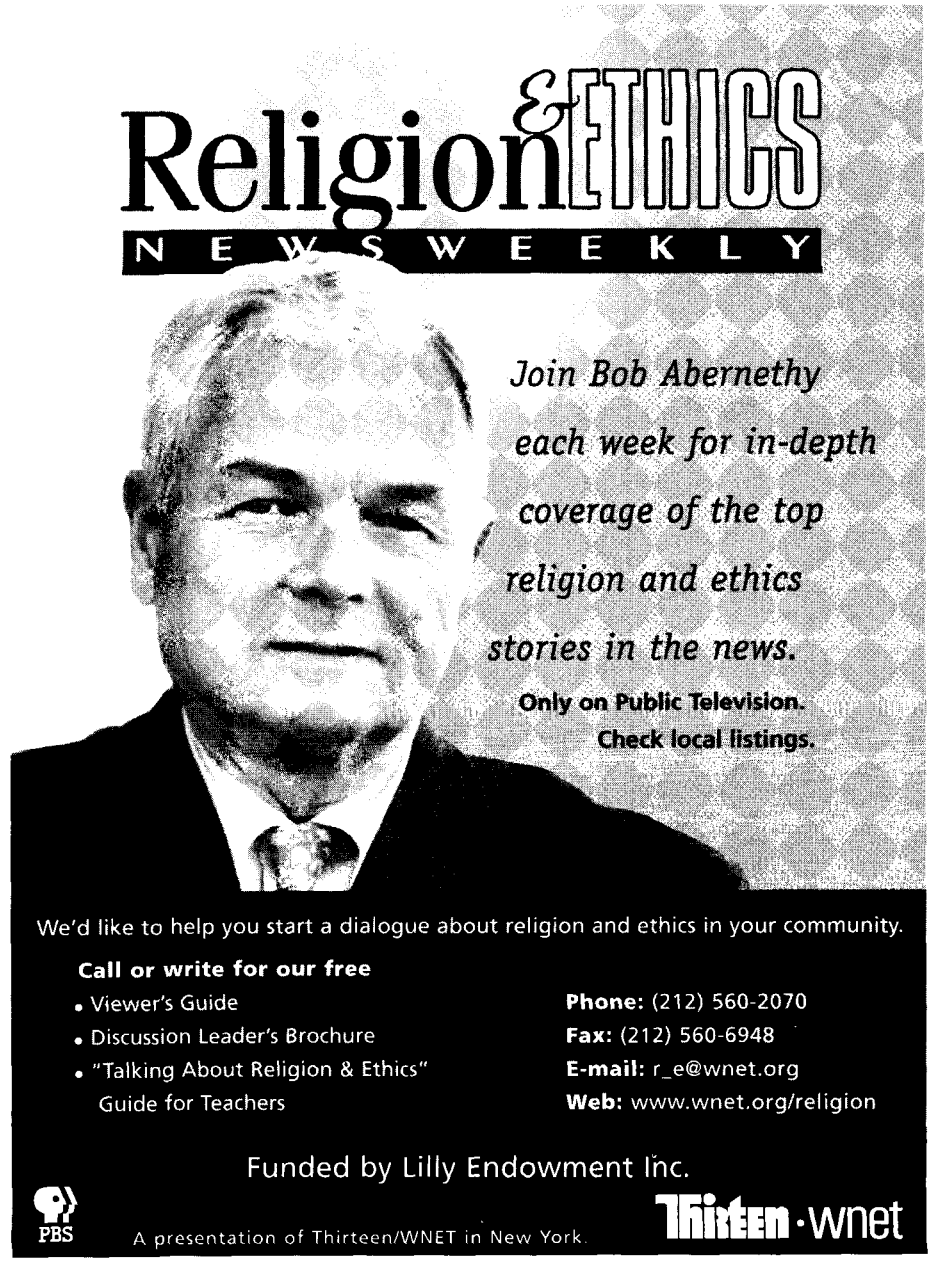
This past August the Special Forces Association declared its official position on this matter, and I fully endorse it. First, a total retraction of the "Valley of Death" story must be made by both CNN and *Time*. They must state categorically that "No American defectors were targeted, no women and children were killed, and nerve gas was not used." Second, both CNN President Richard Kaplan and CNN correspondent Peter Arnett must be dismissed from employment by Time Warner. Finally, equal air time must be provided by CNN to clear the Special Forces' name and all persons involved in the operation.

PERRY M. SMITH
Major General
U.S. Army (retired)
Augusta, Georgia

TO THE EDITOR:

It is heartening to discover that voices in the media are finally delving into the details of the deception that took place in the construction of the CNN-*Time* "Valley of Death" story. Joshua Muravchik correctly states that "while secretly intending to make them out as war criminals, Smith and Oliver wormed their way into the living rooms of Tailwind veterans by promising at last to tell their story." It goes further than that, however.

April Oliver initially contacted me for an interview for the September 1997 *Impact* segment that Mr. Muravchik mentions. She indicated that she was going through John Plaster's recent book, *SOG: The Secret Wars of America's Commandos in Vietnam*, and had been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encouraged by Mr. Plaster to read my book, *Hazardous Duty: An American Soldier in the Twentieth Century*, to gain additional background. I was led to believe that her intent was to tell the American people about the extraordinary role that the men of SOG played in the Vietnam war. The members of SOG were all volunteers who underwent intensive extra training, endured great sacrifices and suffering, and undertook great risks. In the interest of finally being able to tell their heroic story, I agreed to be interviewed by Miss Oliver and encouraged other SOG veterans to cooperate as well.

The resulting shows on CNN's *Impact* and *Newsstand* were a shocking betrayal of what had been April Oliver's stated intent. Mr. Muravchik correctly points out that such a debacle is the result of the media's seeking celebrity through sensationalism. What is appalling is how casually and cavalierly some members of the press are capable of maligning true heroes in the pursuit of casting themselves in that role.

Mr. Muravchik states that the press has become reflexively adversarial toward American institutions, particularly the U.S. military. But an adversarial system implies an informed presentation of all available information so that citizens can make intelligent judgments about the leadership of their country. A truer description of the press in this instance is that it became prosecutorial, projecting a distorted, maliciously false view while ignoring or maligning all contrary evidence no matter how valid or overwhelming.

CNN's retraction and Ted Turner's dramatic exercise in self-pity couched as an apology, do not go nearly far enough in remedying the situation. "Valley of Death" portrayed true heroes as craven war criminals. What is needed is for the true SOG story to be told.

JOHN K. SINGLAUB
Major General
U.S. Army (retired)
Arlington, Virginia

TO THE EDITOR:

"Nerve Gas, Lies, and Videotape" should be required reading for all those professing to be news reporters or commentators. It clearly shows the level to which a supposedly reputable news service can stoop in order to gain an audience, truth being a secondary consideration.

Of particular interest to me was Mr. Muravchik's mention of a September 1997 segment on CNN's *Impact* that, like "Valley of Death," was narrated by Peter Arnett. This "exposé" charged that if SOG teams were captured, they were deliberately killed in B-52 strikes to keep them from falling into enemy hands. In fact, SOG and its supporting air elements frequently—and sometimes at the cost of lives—used all their resources to *recover* teams that were in contact with the enemy or in danger of being overrun. SOG teams were occasionally used in Bomb Damage Assessment (BDA), which involved inserting them into areas recently bombed by B-52's. Arnett, or his writers, saw fit to twist this to imply that the teams themselves were the targets of these strikes.

As one who was privileged to command SOG for two years during the Vietnam war, I would hope that CNN would profit by its mistakes and focus its efforts on portraying the heroism and dedication of our people in uniform instead of attempting to reflect discredit upon them. CNN acted properly in firing many of those responsible for the nerve-gas story but fell short by retaining Peter Arnett. He should at least publicly apologize to the members of SOG whom he so readily maligned and to those members of the media who seek to do their jobs honestly and without bias.

STEPHEN E. CAVANAUGH
Colonel, U.S. Army (retired)
San Diego, California

TO THE EDITOR:

The Special Forces Association is extremely appreciative of the excellent article by Joshua Muravchik. Having conducted our own investigation of "Valley of Death," we have hard evidence to support Mr. Muravchik's conclusion that the CNN program was a lie. For example, we have the verbatim debriefing report from Operation Tailwind, a declassified top-secret report on the mission, and statements from the Cobra gunship pilots, the A-1 Sky Raider pilots, CH-53 Sky Stallion helicopter pilots, a dozen members of Tailwind itself, Admiral Moorer, General Singlaub, Jay Graves, Robert Van Buskirk, and many others.

With respect to CNN's handling of "Valley of Death," we believe that the primary reason the network hired Floyd Abrams was not to investigate the flawed reporting but to soften the liability of CNN-*Time* for presenting such a lie. By emphasizing that the reporters truly believed what they were writing, Mr. Abrams's report sounds like a defense against libel. This strategy will be tested in court, since three lawsuits have already been initiated by Tailwind participants and several more will follow in the near future.

We thank COMMENTARY and Mr. Muravchik for giving the American people an excellent example of objective reporting.

JIMMY DEAN
Special Forces Association
Fayetteville, North Carolina

TO THE EDITOR:

In analyzing the Tailwind fiasco in his meticulous "Nerve Gas, Lies, and Videotape," Joshua Muravchik touches upon an equally significant theme: "a reflexive adversarialism toward established American institutions, foremost among them the military." He is unquestionably right, and right again in concluding that "There will remain a public debt to the nation and its armed forces."

During almost four years as U.S. ambassador to Hungary, I learned that America's best-kept secret is the quality and patriotism of its military. Whether advising a new generation of former Warsaw Pact political and military leaders or managing in spectacular fashion the largest transfer of U.S. forces in Europe since 1945, our military personnel were consistently intelligent, patriotic, highly professional, and fully observant of the paramount principle of civilian control. I always found their attitude, dedication, and performance wholly admirable. The American

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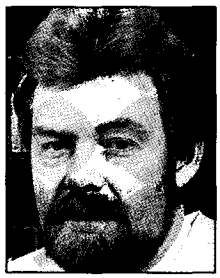

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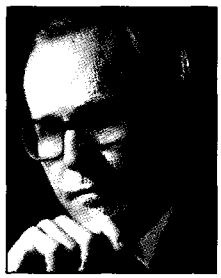

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public, including our journalists, owe our armed forces respect and appreciation.

DONALD BLINKEN
New York City

JOSHUA MURAVCHIK writes:

April Oliver is herself mistaken about the "tenets" of journalism. In an article of the kind I was preparing, in which I was not reporting allegations about her but comparing something she had written with discoverable facts, I was under no more obligation to interview her than I would have been to interview Oliver Stone in a review of his movie, *JFK*. The only source commenting on her work (as distinct from furnishing facts about events) that I invoked was CNN's Abrams report, which I used only for outtakes from interviews Miss Oliver had conducted that illustrated how she had cut and pasted the video to misrepresent her interviewees. I note that she does not challenge the accuracy of any of the transcripts contained in the Abrams report.

Far from not getting April Oliver's side of the story, I was up to my ears in it. I had on hand transcripts of her various appearances on television talk shows after the controversy had broken, her article in the *Washington Post*'s "Outlook" section, and the 80-page rebuttal to the Abrams report that she and Jack Smith had written. I also listened to the press conference at which they presented their rebuttal. None of this material began to explain why statements made by people she had interviewed that directly contradicted the construction the broadcast put on them were left on the cutting-room floor.

The canons of journalism exist for a reason. Since facts are often disputed or difficult to come by, there have to be accepted standards for verifying them. How do I know that something is true? And if I believe something is true, what kind of evidence need I present to demonstrate it? Miss Oliver does not seem to grasp these questions.

Take, for example, the explanation she has offered for the fact that she and Jack Smith now stand virtually alone in defending "Valley of Death." Her version is that CNN broadcast, and *Time* published, a perfectly solid exposé of crimes committed by the U.S. military in Vietnam. Then, however, these news organizations felt so intimidated by pressure from the military community that each mendaciously decided to repudiate its story, besmirch its own reputation, and even (in the case of CNN) enter into out-of-court libel settlements with the soldiers named in the broadcast. If this tale of manipulation of the news media by the military-industrial complex were true, it would be a scandal even bigger than the one Miss Oliver claims to have exposed in her broadcast.

Or consider her argument that I have no standing to criticize her story because I do not have access to her "confidential sources." Ah, well, there's a foolproof defense. But Floyd Abrams did have access to these individuals, and he found that they did not convincingly sustain her tale. At their press conference, Oliver and Smith were asked whether, now that their careers and reputations were at stake, they had appealed to these confidential sources to come forward. They said they had not. Indeed, they acted as if the idea had never occurred to them.

This same inability to understand standards of proof reappears in myriad specifics. Miss Oliver tells us that Admiral Moorer repeatedly affirmed to her and Smith the accuracy of their report. Why then has he denied it to everyone else, and why has CNN paid him a settlement of $200,000? She says that Moorer confirmed the killing of defectors off-camera; if so, why could she not get him to say it on-camera? Now she claims that Moorer also confirmed on-camera that Tailwind's mission was to find defectors; if so, why did she not show it? On the program, he said only that

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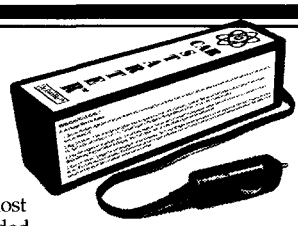

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"I'm sure there were some defectors. There are always defectors." Now she says that Moorer offered "hard confirmations" of the use of sarin in three different interviews; if so, why could she not get a single one on-camera? The sole oblique confirmation that she put on the air was in response to what Moorer later called a trick question.

Now Miss Oliver asserts that she checked Jay Graves's participation in Tailwind with "another SOG 'recon' team leader," but—and here comes another anonymous source—she does not name this leader. So why is it that the Tailwind veterans with whom everyone else has spoken are unanimous in denying Graves's participation? Graves himself has also denied it—in a signed statement.

As for the tape of the new witness who reportedly killed American defectors with nerve gas at locations around Cambodia, CNN spokesmen, who agree that such a tape exists, point out (as Miss Oliver does not) that the image on the film is pixilated so as to hide the identity of this individual. Yet another conveniently unverifiable witness. Miss Oliver would have us believe that in its terror of the military-industrial complex, CNN is repressing this blockbuster, but of course she is free (and motivated, one would think, now that she is at sword's point with CNN) to take the story to another news organization. So far, none has broken it.

A word about Lieutenant Van Buskirk. In light of his own testimony about his imprisonment, his heavy drinking, and his long-term treatment with "mind-bending drugs," plus the fact that his story has changed, no journalists other than the Oliver-Smith-Arnett team have treated him as a credible witness.

Miss Oliver has made much of the fact that it was not Van Buskirk himself but a reporter who applied the term "repressed memory" to his recollections of killing a Caucasian during Tailwind. But if the term is in dispute, the essential facts are not. Van Buskirk has made clear to various journalists that, call it what you will, he lost the recollection of these events for 24 years until he spoke to April Oliver, at which point he first said that the Caucasian was a Russian and only later that he was an American.

In her present letter, Miss Oliver makes an interesting inadvertent admission. She says that Van Buskirk "admi[tted]" that his purported victim was an American "only . . . after we [i.e., Oliver and Smith] had found four other reconnaissance personnel who told us they were sent into the area to scout for Americans." Aside from the fact that four more anonymous sources have suddenly turned up, this tells us that it was Miss Oliver who gave Van Buskirk the idea that his victim was an American.

Her other points are not worth dwelling on, but they are all wrong. Sarin is of course lethal through the skin, depending on the quantity used. Apart from his pal and neighbor Van Buskirk, nobody involved in Tailwind believes that Jim Cathey was there, and his story of how he got there is preposterous. Whatever AP report Miss Oliver is alluding to, Melvin Laird and all other relevant past and present military officials deny that sarin was ever used in Vietnam. And so on.

Finally, I did not attribute Miss Oliver's Tailwind concoction to ideological motives; I assumed that the motive was blind ambition. Perhaps she did work for Lee Atwater in her tender years—the man is not here to tell us. But when she boasts of her "extensive writings," she conveniently omits one detail that casts her in a different light. Nearly all these writings have appeared in magazines with a distinct political valence, ranging from the liberal *National Catholic Reporter* to the leftist *In These Times* and the *Nation*. Thus, even in describing her own ideological affinities, April Oliver has once again, so to speak, left something on the cutting-room floor.

I am grateful to General Smith, General Singlaub, Colonel Cavanaugh, Jimmy Dean, and Ambassador Blinken for writing and for their kind words.

Testing

TO THE EDITOR:

In his article, "The War Against Testing" [September], David W. Murray does not address one of the principal criticisms of the SAT: its results appear to predict nothing except first-year college grades. Since these do not show what a student is likely to do later in his studies, they do not seem particularly meaningful.

Granted, it would be difficult to evaluate significant accomplishments such as "life achievement" objectively. But the Educational Testing Service could certainly produce a comparison of test scores with overall college grades and graduation rates. A crucial college-entrance examination should at least be able to prove it is relevant to actual college performance.

STEPHEN E. ADLER
Holliswood, New York

TO THE EDITOR:

David W. Murray tells us that "every major premise on which [the anti-testing campaign] rests is false." Standardized tests, he argues, do not contain significant cultural or gender bias, nor do they favor those with test-taking "smarts," higher incomes, or wider life experiences. Furthermore, the tests exhibit no serious failure to predict college success. In sum, they are our most reliable and objective measure of academic merit.

I do not write to challenge these premises, but to express my wonder at the incompleteness of Mr. Murray's discussion. Having rejected the test critics' explanations for poor minority test performance, he offers no alternative explanations or any suggestions for addressing the serious social problems that arise when minorities find limited access to personal advancement through higher education.

Those who challenge the use of standardized tests for college admissions may not be correct (or even 100-percent honest) in their analyses, but I give them this—they are concerned with the social implications of minority underperformance and they are looking (perhaps in all the wrong places) for some kind of solution.

Mr. Murray, on the other hand, seems content to end the discussion at the point where blacks and Hispanics are seen as inferior

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academic material. If this means that their opportunities and career expectations must be circumscribed, Mr. Murray gives no hint that this troubles him or merits discussion. Does he just take it as a fact of life about which nothing can or should be done? I find it hard to accept that a shrug is his best response to so large an issue.

His article would have had far greater value and interest if he had included his own explanations for minority underperformance (since he rejects the explanations of the test critics) and his views on what can be done to improve things. Perhaps he would say that these issues go beyond the limited scope of his article; but in fact they are the issues that give test scores and test validity their burning importance in our time.

G. R. PATERSON
Wilmette, Illinois

TO THE EDITOR:

I would like to add two points to David W. Murray's excellent "The War Against Testing." First, when test scores are ignored in favor of affirmative action, it is not only unfair to those with the best scores, it also disserves the racial and ethnic minority groups that are the supposed beneficiaries. Studies by the Center for Equal Opportunity and others have documented the strong correlation between receiving a discriminatory preference, on the one hand, and being less likely to graduate, on the other. A student is better off graduating from a second-tier school than being admitted to a top-rung school and flunking out.

Thus, as Stephan and Abigail Thernstrom discuss in their recent book, *America in Black and White*, before racial preferences were ended at the University of California-Berkeley, the black-white gap on SAT scores there was 288 points, and the black dropout rate was 42 percent (versus only 16 percent for whites). Likewise, a study published last year by the Center for Equal Opportunity noted that, at UC-San Diego, 71 percent of the whites entering in 1988 graduated in five years, as did 76 percent of those entering in 1989; for blacks, the rate for both 1988 and 1989 was 41 percent.

Second, replacing standardized tests with some other selection criterion in order to achieve a predetermined racial and ethnic mix is not only bad policy, it is illegal. The federal courts had no trouble ruling that the states were violating the Constitution and the civil-rights statutes when they tried to change their college-admissions criteria in the wake of *Brown* v. *Board of Education* (1954) in order to keep blacks out. Scrapping a test in the wake of *Hopwood* v. *Texas* (1996) because it results in "too many" whites and Asians being admitted is legally indistinguishable.

ROGER CLEGG
Center for Equal Opportunity
Washington, D.C.

TO THE EDITOR:

David W. Murray's highly astute analysis of the "The War Against Testing" brings to mind the campaign waged by campus radicals during the 60's and 70's against college grading, which also had as its primary target the so-called elitist bias in higher education. The inescapable truth is that those who are harmed the most when such practices are eliminated are precisely those at the lower income levels who stand to gain the most from merit-based evaluations.

The fact that the mindset Mr. Murray describes occupies not the fringes but large parts of the mainstream of today's educational establishment is not only disturbing but also reflective of the effectiveness of the Left in helping to delegitimize what once were regarded as liberal-democratic values.

DAVID LOWE
North Potomac, Maryland

TO THE EDITOR:

"The War Against Testing" that David W. Murray describes has reached the secondary level here in New Orleans, where our magnet schools are under assault by the Orleans Parish School Board and the Office for

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Civil Rights (OCR) of the U.S. Department of Education. Two complaints alleging racial discrimination were received at OCR, which began an investigation. Before any formal findings were made, however, OCR proposed and the school board accepted a Voluntary Compliance Agreement, intended, in the words of a local school official, "to ensure continued efforts to provide equal access to all students, particularly African-American students, related to admission criteria" for the magnet schools.

Although not part of either complaint, Benjamin Franklin High School, an academically rigorous college-prep school, is at the center of the dispute. To be accepted at Franklin, applicants must score 120 or better on the Otis-Lennon School Ability Index Test and at the 75th percentile or better on the Metropolitan Achievement Test. Ninety-two percent of students in Orleans Parish public schools are African-American. Seventy-five percent of students at Franklin are not.

The plan proposed by the school board would eliminate the use of any IQ test in determining admissions. It would instead weigh equally an application form, an essay, classroom grades, scores from an achievement test, school attendance, recommendations from teachers, parents, and others, and student portfolios, visual materials, and interviews. According to the school board, "Any student reaching a required minimum score would be considered eligible for admission."

After a public outcry, implementation of this plan was delayed and is now bogged down in an acrimoniously divided committee. The old entrance criteria have been thrown out without being replaced by new ones. I cannot see how lowering the standards in our schools will improve the education of the students who attend them.

JOHN M. WEIL
New Orleans, Louisiana

DAVID W. MURRAY writes:

It is true, as Stephen E. Adler notes, that the SAT is best at predicting first-year college grades. This should come as no surprise, since students specialize after the freshman year and begin to choose courses of study that vary greatly in difficulty. Even so, after taking into account the difference between majoring in physics and, say, sociology, the SAT continues to be a fairly robust predictor of both grades and graduation rates. This correlation would be even stronger but for the obvious fact that those who enroll after performing poorly on the test often subsequently drop out.

G.R. Paterson properly challenges the defenders of testing to suggest ways to improve the performance of minority students. I, for one, heartily endorse any educational experiment that stands a chance of establishing a closer partnership between schools and parents. We are all "home-schooled" in some fundamental sense. Parents must be encouraged to value and reinforce academic achievement and to teach perseverance, which is perhaps the greatest of "intellectual" gifts. Let us learn from those disadvantaged groups that have achieved high academic standards not by special pleading but by sheer accomplishment.

Of course, we can choose instead to follow the education establishment and continue denying the reality of the test results. As John M. Weil points out, this is precisely what is being done in the magnet schools of New Orleans. Worse still, as I showed in my article, are the evasions practiced by universities in their effort to salvage some form of affirmative action. Like Mr. Weil, I find it difficult to see how renouncing thermometers will help us diagnose and treat a fevered patient.

My thanks to Roger Clegg and David Lowe for their praise and helpful comments.

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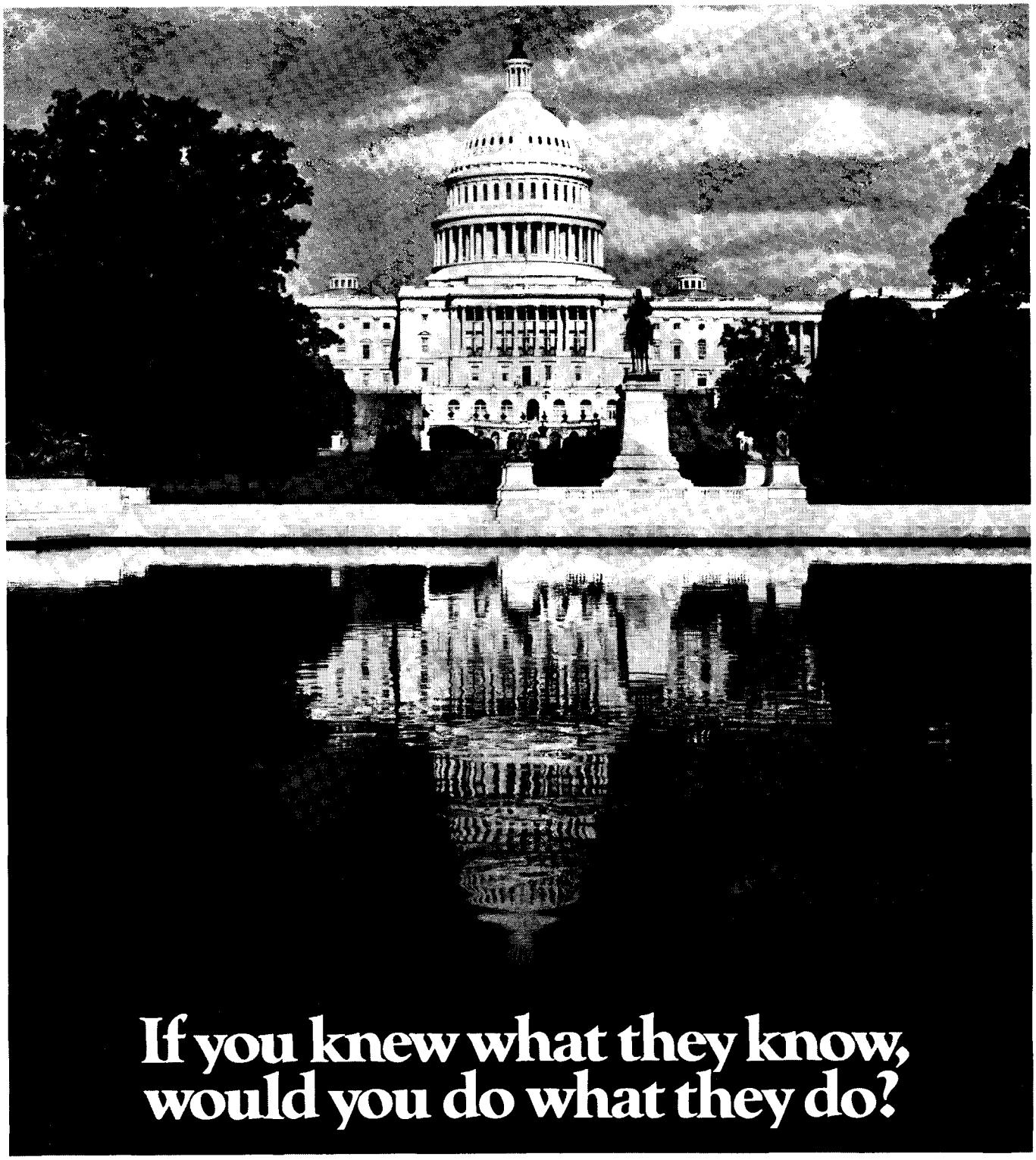

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Commentary
December 1998

What Are Parents For?

Mary Eberstadt

THAT PARENTS are the premier influence in a child's life is one of those pieces of conventional wisdom that seem to have behind them both the incontrovertible weight of experience and the accumulated evidence of a vast literature. Everybody knows that decent, conscientious parents who are attentive and loving to their children will almost always have children who are decent and conscientious, attentive and loving in their turn. Conversely, troubled—or, as we now say, "dysfunctional"—parents tend to have kids who are troubled themselves.

Of course these are human rules, which means there are always exceptions; but the exceptions are hardly such as to shake anyone's faith in the validity of the rules. Besides, whole libraries are stocked with books, both popular and scholarly, dwelling on the importance of what transpires in children's early years and attesting, on the basis of mountains of research, to the link between parental practices and children's performance—cognitive, psychological, social, and more.

Given all this, it is easy to understand why Judith Rich Harris's *The Nurture Assumption: Why Children Turn Out the Way They Do** should have become the center of a storm of controversy since its publication last August. For here is a book that takes on this conventional wisdom and challenges it root and branch. Hailed by some, and already pressed into the service of dubious causes, it has also been roundly condemned and denounced by many others. I am going to argue for an alternative judgment—that *The Nurture Assumption* is, for reasons that have not been recognized, a stunning if also crucially limited achievement. But let me start by taking note of the reception the book has garnered so far.

There is, first, the question of the author's credentials. Judith Rich Harris is not only a nonacademic but a failed academic, having been dismissed from Harvard's graduate program 30 years ago on the grounds that she was unlikely to produce original research. In the decades after leaving Harvard, she had, as she herself puts it, "no mentors and no students," was bound to her home by a lingering illness, and maintained her link to the professional world as a writer of textbooks in developmental psychology. "She is what journalists call a 'rewrite man,'" John Leo wrote in a highly critical piece on her book in *U.S. News & World Report*, "an unknown with no credentials."†

The response from a number of leading psychologists has been exceptionally harsh. According to *Newsweek*, which ran a cover story on the book, Harvard's Jerome Kagan is "embarrassed for psychology" by *The Nurture Assumption*, and T. Berry Brazelton finds its thesis "absurd." "My first reaction," said Urie Bronfenbrenner, professor emeritus at

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* Free Press, 462 pp., $26.00.

† Ironically, *The Nurture Assumption* grew out of an article Harris published in *Psychological Review* in 1995, an article that subsequently won a prize named after the same Harvard dean who had presided over her exit from graduate school.

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Cornell, "is amazement that this book should be taken seriously." Quite a few psychologists have damned Harris not only for her lack of credentials but for being derivative to boot. In the *New York Review of Books*, Howard Gardner, the theorist of multiple intelligence, called her book "overstated, misleading, and potentially harmful."

True, not all professionals have stacked up against Harris. Some, including the evolutionary psychologist Steven Pinker, who wrote the book's foreword, have sounded strong notes of support, and psychologists in the area of behavioral genetics have also rallied around. Still others have backed her on the broad grounds that at least she offers a corrective to prevailing orthodoxies.

Support for Harris has also been forthcoming from those enamored for reasons of their own with the idea that parents may be less important than we think. Positive comments have rolled in from Betty Holcolm, the author of *Not Guilty! The Good News about Working Mothers*, and from Carol Travis, who in a review of the book in the *New York Times* called it a necessary counter to "politicians elected on the claims that day care, divorce, and working mothers are bad for children." *Newsweek*, in its cover piece, took note of how welcome *The Nurture Assumption* will be to some for questioning the link between divorce and "problem behavior like drug use and drinking."

The task of sorting out the noise about *The Nurture Assumption* from what it actually says is made somewhat harder by Harris's own penchant for overstatement. To read her book is to recognize immediately the discrepancy between what Robert Wright, in *Time*, called her "too-breezy formulations of her thesis" and the "key qualifications" she enters in the course of her discussion. Nevertheless, when the various obstacles are cleared away—the hype, the professional furor, the errors of omission and commission by author and critics alike—what remains is an extraordinarily ambitious attempt to reexamine, from the ground up, an entire century's worth of findings on the forces that mold the child of today into the adult of tomorrow. For the purpose of assessing that effort, it is, or ought to be, a matter of indifference whether Harris is derivative or original, credentialed or a rank amateur.

II

The Nurture Assumption, writes Harris at the outset, has two purposes:

> [F]irst, to dissuade you of the notion that a child's personality—what used to be called "character"—is shaped or modified by the child's parents; and second, to give you an alternative view of how the child's personality is shaped.

This, then, is a mission in two parts—one destructive, the other reconstructive. Let us consider them in turn.

The idea that parents have the power to shape a child's personality for life does not appear as a guiding precept across peoples and across time. It is, as Harris writes, culturally specific. In societies other than our own, a child's life has been deemed to lie in the hands of fate, just as, in societies driven by religious belief, the course of an individual's life has been consigned primarily to God. It is mainly in Western secular culture, and particularly in the past century or so, that a different idea has come to hold sway.

The "true father" of that different idea, Harris writes, is Sigmund Freud. It was he who "constructed . . . an elaborate scenario in which all the psychological ills of adults could be traced back to things that happened to them when they were quite young and in which their parents were heavily implicated." But Freud's insight resonated far beyond the schools of Freudian thought itself. Behaviorists, too, hypothesized that a child is molded by whatever happens in the early years; with the right conditioning, John B. Watson famously declared, he could turn any "dozen healthy infants" into "any type of specialist I might select—doctor, lawyer, artist, merchant-chief, and yes, even beggarman and thief." Like Freud, behaviorists simply assumed that the first forces shaping the human dough would leave a permanent imprint.

Yet, as Harris observes—and here is where the argument begins in earnest—few of us today would believe that Watson's experiment could actually succeed. One reason is the powerful evidence we now possess of the effects of an individual's genetic code on his life. Although debates rage about the relative importance of heredity, hardly anyone denies that it plays *some* significant role in who we are. From the findings of the human genome project to the work of behavioral geneticists on adoptive versus biological children, and on twins reared apart, it is clear that certain things, including at least some personality traits, are inborn—that something has left imprints on the human dough before any human hands have come to touch it.

What, then, of the nongenetic portion of our personalities—the part shaped by environment? Most of us would say that the most important such influence is home life, and above all our parents. That, in a nutshell, is the "nurture assumption"—and it is also where we confront the radical heart of Harris's

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argument. For it is her contention that the "tremendous amount of research" committed to supporting this assumption "is not what it appears to be: it does not prove what it appears to prove."

In considering Harris's refutation of the nurture assumption, it is essential to bear in mind the word *prove*. She does not dispute that parents "who do a good job of managing their lives, and who get along well with others, tend to have children who are also good at managing their lives and getting along with others." Nor does she dispute that children "who are treated with affection and respect tend to do better at managing their lives and their personal relationships than children who are treated harshly." These generalizations, Harris readily concedes, not only comport with our ordinary experience; they have been verified many times over by social-science research. What she disputes, rather, is that this research has established a causal link—that "the children of pleasant and competent people grow up to be pleasant and competent people *because* of what they learned at home and how they were treated by their parents."

To demonstrate her point, Harris considers a wide range of specific cases. Although it is impossible to replicate her many-faceted critique in an essay, a couple of representative examples may convey both its gist and its flavor.

We can begin with one particular form of parent-child interaction: corporal punishment, or spanking. Does spanking make children more aggressive? Virtually all child-care experts would say yes—and so, one is confident, would many parents. In fact, spanking is now not only widely stigmatized but, in some places, actually criminalized. This radical change, in a practice that until recently was quite common, has not come about because spanking is impossible to distinguish from child abuse; nearly anyone can tell the difference between beating a child in order to hurt him and slapping him on the backside for running out into traffic. What has made spanking increasingly unacceptable is the idea that, constituting as it does aggressive parental behavior, it makes children more aggressive in turn.

The logic behind this widespread belief, Harris writes, is at first blush persuasive; and yet, upon inspection, most of the research on the subject turns out to be suspect—indeed, from the point of view of social science, "worthless."

She points in the first place to methodological problems. For the most part, the research on spanking does not distinguish among styles of child-rearing. Some parents—particularly those in minority ethnic groups and in low-income neighborhoods—tend to spank more than do white parents in middle-class neighborhoods. Children in the former groups can be shown to behave more aggressively and to get into more trouble than children in the latter. But what does that tell us? Not much, especially when it is placed side by side with findings about another group—Asian Americans—who do "use physical punishment but . . . *don't* have aggressive kids" (emphasis added). There are simply too many variables at play for any meaningful conclusion to be drawn from these data.

And that is not all. In most studies, spanking is a one-way street, something parents do to children. What this overlooks, in Harris's judgment, is that the relationship between parent and child is not static but dynamic:

> Within any ethnic group or social class, some kids are more aggressive than others and some get spanked more than others. If aggressive kids get spanked more, is the kids' aggressiveness caused by the spankings or are the parents doing a lot of spanking because they don't like the way the kids are behaving?

In most cases, the answer is "impossible to tell."

A way to minimize this problem, Harris suggests, would be to follow children over a number of years. One recent study did just that, concluding that "when parents use corporal punishment to reduce antisocial behavior, the long-term effect . . . tends to be the opposite"—that is, antisocial behavior increases. This result made headline news, for it appeared to verify that spanking does indeed have long-term negative consequences. Overlooked, however, was the fact that another study, appearing in the *same* issue of the *same* professional journal, reached the opposite conclusion. Indeed, this latter study indicated that for "black children of any age, and for the younger children in the study regardless of race, . . . spanking actually led to a *decrease* in aggressive behavior."

What are we to make of this? Harris zeroes in on a key difference in the two studies: the authors of the first were measuring aggression at home, while the authors of the second were measuring aggression outside the home. Putting both studies together suggests that, while spanking may become a vicious cycle that produces greater troublesomeness at home, "being spanked at home does not make kids more aggressive when they're not at home." And what *that* suggests is just how shaky is the claim that spanking induces aggressiveness as a personality trait, let alone

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that reducing spanking will, as the first study asserted, "reduce the level of violence in American society."

THIS HOMELY example points to a number of themes that emerge throughout Harris's critique of the literature. Much of it, in her reading, fails to take intrinsic qualities of children into account; fails to disentangle the effects of parents on children from the effects of children on parents; and customarily overlooks the difference between behavior in the home and behavior in the outside world—the world in which, as Harris observes, "children will spend the rest of their lives."

To take another, inevitably controversial, example: does growing up in a broken family leave permanent scars on a child's personality? It is incontestable, Harris writes, that "children are generally happier if they have two parents," and "if they have evidence that both parents care about them and think well of them." But the happiness of children is not at issue in the national debate over divorce and fatherlessness in America. That debate is centered on something else: "Do children with fathers turn out better in the long run than children without fathers? And if they do turn out better, is it *because* they had a father?" To the many researchers, pundits, and laymen who think the case for answering yes has been conclusively established, Harris again offers a series of counterarguments.

She begins with Judith Wallerstein's landmark 1980 study, *Surviving the Breakup*—a book that, to quote the subtitle of its most recent edition, "revolutionized America's thinking" by showing the detrimental effects of divorce on children and adolescents. Without disputing Wallerstein's evidence or interpretations, Harris points out that her science is fatally flawed by the absence of any control group against which to measure her findings—that is, of any *non*-divorcing families "with which to compare the children of her patients."

But Harris also finds fault with researchers who escape her charge against Wallerstein, in particular the sociologists Sara McLanahan and Gary Sandefur (whose 1994 book, *Growing Up With a Single Parent*, figured prominently in Barbara Dafoe Whitehead's explosive article in the *Atlantic*, "Dan Quayle was Right"). McLanahan and Sandefur's conclusion, one of the most influential social-science theses of the decade, is that:

> Children who grow up in a household with only one biological parent are worse off, on average, than children who grow up in a household with both of their biological parents, regardless of the parents' race or educational background, regardless of whether the parents are married when the child is born, and regardless of whether the resident parent remarries.

By "worse off," the authors mean that the children are more likely to drop out of school; that they are less likely to get jobs; that the girls are more likely to become unwed mothers; and so forth.

"Clearly," Harris writes, McLanahan and Sandefur "believe that the parents' living apart is the *cause* of the kids' problems." But is it? Could not those problems be explained "without reference to the children's experience in the home," but by external factors associated with single-parent families?

The first such factor is income. Divorce typically "leads to a drastic decline in a family's standard of living," and this makes it harder to afford things that can affect children's social standing among their peers. It can also make it harder for them to go to college, leaving them "less motivated to graduate from high school and to avoid getting pregnant." Most important, the loss of income affects "the neighborhood they grow up in and the school they attend." Middle-class neighborhoods and good middle-class schools, the kind where "almost all the kids graduate . . . and hardly any have babies," are simply out of reach for most single mothers.

Another factor that could help account for the bad outcomes, Harris suggests, is moving. With or without an intact family, moving is "rough on kids." Children of multiple moves are "more likely to be rejected by their peers" and to have "more behavioral problems and more academic problems than kids who have stayed put." When combined with loss of income, she concludes, changes in residence "could account for most of the differences between kids with dads and kids without them."

What about the well-established finding that children of divorced parents are themselves more likely to divorce when they are adults? We have here a clear-cut test case of the nurture assumption, one in which parental behavior seems to exert a psychological influence well into adult life. Harris summarizes a study of 1,500 pairs of adult identical and fraternal twins that appears to confirm that thesis. "The divorce rate," she reports, "was 19 percent among the twins whose parents had remained married" but "considerably higher"—29 percent—for twins whose parents had divorced. And yet, an analysis of these results, she writes, shows that

> about half the variation in the risk of divorce could be attributed to genetic influences—to genes shared with twins or parents. The other

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half was due to environmental causes. But *none* of the variation could be blamed on the home the twins grew up in.

In citing heredity, Harris does not mean there is such a thing as a "divorce gene." Rather, she has in mind "an assortment of personality characteristics, each rough-hewn by a complex of genes and shaped and sanded by the environment," that increases the chances of an unwise choice or of difficulty in getting along with people—traits like impulsivity, for example, or aggressiveness, or a tendency to be easily bored. Genes do not cause people to divorce, but we cannot rule out the possibility that something genetic is going on in parent-child divorce statistics—any more than we can rule it out in other cases where parents with problems have children with problems, including what experts call "the intergenerational transmission of child abuse."

Nor does Harris mean that parents need not worry about the effects of divorce. As I have already suggested, she is careful to stipulate the many ways in which it can be bad for children. But, she insists, the *fact* of divorce itself must be distinguished from the kinds of fallout—loss of income, social disruption, etc.—that are its frequent but not inevitable accompaniments. When it is so distinguished, we find that divorce, in and of itself, "has no lasting effects on the way children behave when they're *not* home and no lasting effects on their personalities" (emphasis added).

III

LET ME summarize thus far. "Socialization research," Harris writes, "has demonstrated one thing clearly and irrefutably: a parent's behavior toward a child affects how the child behaves in the presence of the parent or in contexts associated with the parent"—but not otherwise. A child who has assumed the role of spoiled youngest child in the home may act according to stereotype for as long as his parents live and whenever he is with them; but there is no evidence that he carries the burdens or benefits of this role outside.* Similarly, a child who has been ill-treated at home may always hold that fact against his parents and act surly or withdrawn when he is around them; but this poisonous relationship need not translate into his relations with people outside. The content of what children learn at home varies, but whatever that content is, "They may cast it off when they step outside as easily as the dorky sweater their mother made them wear."

What *The Nurture Assumption* means to challenge, in short, is the fundamental idea that the parent-child relationship is the primary influence on other human relationships to come—the "template," in the phrase of the British psychologist John Bowlby. This idea is a bedrock principle for many, perhaps most, clinical psychologists, and the foundation of most popular treatments of human psychology and development, from Penelope Leach's classic texts on child care to the likes of Susan Forward's *Toxic Parents*. If it is wrong—if the nurture assumption is not in fact the template we think it is, and cannot explain why children turn out the way they do—what, if anything, can?

Harris (and here is the reconstructive aspect of her book) thinks she has an answer to this question, in the form of what she calls "group-socialization" theory. According to this theory, socialization is not something that parents "do" to children; it is something that children do to themselves, out of the innate human drive to "learn how to behave like other people in their own social category." And they do it not by imitating and observing their parents but by observing and imitating their peers. Indeed, so intent are children on behaving like the other members of their group that in cases where a conflict arises between their home life and their peer life, the peer group will "trump" the home nearly every time.

Harris's theory is inspired first of all by studies in linguistics, in particular the provocative finding that peers, not parents, appear to be the decisive influence on how an immigrant child speaks his new language. Just as the nurture assumption would not have predicted this fact, she writes, so too are other puzzles in development better explained by a group theory like hers. Harris's evidence for this thesis is piecemeal and circumstantial rather than systematic and dispositive, and hence less dramatic than her attack on socialization research. But it will nonetheless cause a *frisson* of recognition in many a parent.

Consider a small but suggestive example: the problem of the picky eater. At dinner, the parents of this child consume, say, spinach and salad and fish; the child declines them all. The more his parents cajole and importune, the more rigidly he refuses. Day after day, in many homes with young children, mealtime is wartime for just this reason. All the parental "modeling" in the world cannot induce a four-year-old to eat what his parents eat.

Yet eventually he does eat all these things and more. What causes the change? Very often it is that

* One subset of Harris's argument against the nurture assumption is her critique of 50 years of research into birth-order effects, the evidence for which, she contends at length, "has been knocked down again and again."

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his friend in preschool brought salad for lunch, or his schoolmates in the cafeteria ate fish there. How many parents have been amazed to learn that their child has happily devoured lettuce, or veal, or mushrooms at a friend's house after years of belligerently spurning them at home?

Or consider a form of behavior most people do *not* want their children to emulate: smoking. It is widely assumed that whether or not a teenager takes up smoking is heavily influenced by whether his parents smoke; indeed, writes Harris, "that is why most parents who smoke feel guilty about it, and many quit for that reason." But in fact the adult model is *not* the most influential; rather, "the best predictor of whether a teenager will become a smoker is whether her friends smoke." Then how explain the correlation between parents and teenagers who smoke? Here again, Harris argues, we cannot dismiss the role of heredity; the *potential* for addiction to nicotine is at least partly genetic. In other words, "exposure to peers who smoke is what determines whether or not a teenager will experiment with tobacco. Her genes determine whether or not she will get hooked."

Or consider, finally, criminality. In general, writes Harris, behavioral studies indicate that a home environment shared by twins or siblings has little effect on how the siblings turn out relative to one another. But criminality is an exception: the chance that a given child will become a criminal is higher if he has a criminal sibling. To most observers, this result is *de-facto* evidence for the nurture assumption: the "match in criminality" between siblings or twins must have something to do with the influence of the home.

To Harris, however, the correlations suggest something different. When the data are examined more closely, it turns out that "the likelihood that two siblings will match in criminality is higher if they are the same sex and closer together in age. It is higher in twins (even if they are not identical) than in ordinary siblings, and higher in twins who spend a lot of time together outside the home than in those who lead separate lives." Conversely, siblings are less likely to match in criminality if one has several years on the other—even though the home environment remains the same. The missing link, Harris suggests, would appear to be that "kids from the same home also share a neighborhood and, in some cases, a peer group."

IN ALL these examples, is Harris doing more than belaboring the obvious? After all, no one would seriously deny that children are influenced by forces outside the home—that is why parents worry so much about everything from what is on the Internet to the fact that their daughter's best friend wears the shortest skirts in school. Harris, however, is contending not simply that peers are a competing force in a child's development, but that in some or perhaps even in most cases, they are the *primary* such influence.

Of course, most children do, in part for genetic reasons, tend to resemble their parents in many ways. And of course, all kinds of things are learned at home—language, manners, cooking, playing the piano, what it is like to be a doctor or truck driver, and so on *ad infinitum*. These in turn become part of the knowledge that a child takes with him to the outside world. In cases where what is learned at home does not conflict with the behaviors and attitudes of the child's peer group, Harris acknowledges, these influences can last a lifetime.

But there's the rub. The one real power parents have to determine "the course of their child's life," in Harris's view, is in deciding which neighborhood to live in and thus, indirectly, which sorts of peers he will associate with. In the early years, she notes, "parents have almost complete control" over this issue. But by the time children reach the age of ten or so, "all bets are off." The most they can hope for is that those early relationships will have translated into good peers rather than bad ones, and that the school and neighborhood they have ended up in will minimize any conflict with what has been learned at home.

What Harris is saying, it is important to stress, goes against the grain of almost all contemporary literature on child-rearing. No mother diligently doing everything the advice books recommend in order to boost her child's self-esteem will want to hear that her efforts are likely to have few if any lasting effects on his personality—and certainly fewer effects than such status-enhancing benefits as making sure he has proper orthodonture or is able to join sports teams with his friends. In a culture that not too long ago gave us the phrase "designer children," the notion that parents have limited influence on their offspring does indeed seem positively perverse.

That, nevertheless, is Harris's message, and (just to complete the perversity) she means it to apply in more than one direction. Just as "the idea that we can make our children turn out any way we want is an illusion," no less illusory is the idea that our parents are the primary begetters of our own problems as adults. "As for what's wrong with you," she concludes in her parting words to the reader, "don't blame it on your parents."

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IV

How well has Judith Rich Harris succeeded in persuading us that what she says is true?

The answer depends, in large part, on the standard of proof to which the social sciences, and psychology in particular, can reasonably be held. Harris's attack on the nurture assumption—the destructive half of her argument—consists, as we have seen, of a case-by-case critique of research that purports to show a connection between parental and child behavior. In some of these cases, she is able to demonstrate, the results suffer from assorted methodological limitations, such as the absence of a control group, or the failure to account for other factors like observer bias, parent-to-child effects, and the role played by heredity. Most of what Harris writes in this vein is not only illuminating but thoroughly persuasive.

In the case of other, better, studies, ones that do show trustworthy correlations between parental and child behavior, Harris resorts to a different tack: correlations, she writes, are "inherently ambiguous," and in any event do not prove causality. This is a powerful polemical weapon, one that has formed part of the arsenal of skeptics at least since the 18th-century Scottish philosopher David Hume invoked it against the metaphysics of his own time. Hume's best-known example was the humble fact that the sun rises and sets every day. Most people, he argued, draw an incorrect inference from this fact—namely, that the sun will rise tomorrow *because* it has risen each previous day. But an unfailing pattern does not, according to Hume, prove causality; it merely shows the "constant conjunction" of events.

Hume's insight did more than remind philosophers that they ought to exercise care in their assertions; it sparked a lasting revolution in Western thought. It is because of Hume that much of modern philosophy evolved the way it did, from the British empiricist tradition to Continental opposition to that tradition in all its forms. Most famously, Immanuel Kant went on to formulate his own answer to Humean skepticism in the *Critique of Pure Reason*—a book that, as Kant put it in a celebrated phrase, owed its very existence to the fact that Hume's insight had roused him from his "dogmatic slumber."

It is fair to say that Harris hopes her own arguments, and others like them, will have a similarly lasting effect on the way psychology is done in the future—freeing us both from the clutches of Freud and from the limits of behaviorism, and simultaneously opening us to a new realism in which other facts about human development, particularly the role of heredity and the importance of peer groups, are given their proper due. But the success of this ambitious hope depends critically on the answer to one question: whether it is reasonable, in the case of psychology, to demand the epistemological standard of proof that Harris insists upon.

Are all those mountains of studies that socialization researchers have amassed truly "useless," for the reason that correlation does not prove causality? I think not, on the simple grounds that some correlations are more meaningful than others. By meaningful I do not have in mind statistical significance, a technical concept, but rather what any reasonable man or woman would find meaningful.

Driving home her point about the limited utility of correlations, Harris produces an example by analogy. Suppose that broccoli-eating and wealth could be shown to go together consistently; would we infer from this fact that eating broccoli is what causes wealth, and that if we stop eating broccoli we will get poorer? In her view, the correlations used to support the nurture assumption are no more reliable than these. But the analogy is a bad one. The reason we would never infer that eating broccoli causes wealth is that we already know from independent evidence that the idea is absurd. Correlations among important social phenomena are something else entirely.

David Blankenhorn's book, *Fatherless America* (1995), is a good case in point, though unfortunately Harris does not discuss it. A careful writer, Blankenhorn acknowledges at the outset the "difficulty of proving causation in the social sciences." Nevertheless, he goes on to argue, "the weight of evidence" does suggest that fatherlessness lies at the root of a number of undesirable behaviors. In Blankenhorn's words, "children living apart from their fathers are far more likely than other children to be expelled or suspended from school, to display emotional and behavioral problems, to have difficulty getting along with their peers, and to get in trouble with police." Citing the work of Douglas J. Besharov, he also calls attention to the fact that "the spreading risk of childhood sexual abuse is directly linked to the decline of married fatherhood."

The correlations here speak for themselves. If you show me, with all the proper controls for income, race, and the rest, a group of fatherless households, I will show you homes that are, on average, at higher risk for criminal behavior, child abuse, trouble in school, and all the rest. It is undoubtedly true, as Harris would insist, that other factors are affecting this outcome, including genetically-influenced behavior on the part of the child. But we hardly need to establish causality beyond a metaphysical doubt to

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see that if fatherlessness is a strong predictor of certain sorts of behavior, then fatherlessness is something we should be looking at if we want to reduce those behaviors.

For the purposes of metaphysics, David Hume's observation was indeed profound. But would that have stopped even *him* from wagering that the sun would rise tomorrow? The fact that we can make similar wagers about properly derived social-science findings tells us that we do indeed know something meaningful after all. We can rule out the inference that broccoli-eating causes wealth; but we cannot similarly rule out the idea that fatherlessness is the root cause of a number of aberrant behaviors—indeed, the evidence fairly screams for just such a causal inference.

THE SECOND problem with the standard of proof Harris demands is that she applies it inconsistently. Socialization researchers are subjected by her to the highest scrutiny, often to impressive effect; behavioral geneticists are not. Although I have not read the famous twin studies that Harris frequently cites, or other studies of this kind that she marshals for her argument, it is abundantly clear that she does not train her analytic sights on them with anything like the intensity she devotes to their counterparts in socialization research. How, precisely, do behavioral geneticists define "personality traits"? Just how do they decide that certain individuals exhibit certain traits? Are we really to take the findings of these studies on faith, as if they were free of the embedded assumptions, overinterpretations, and other failings that Harris so adroitly identifies elsewhere?

Similarly, Harris appears to have swallowed whole the maxims of evolutionary psychology—that is, the idea that all human characteristics and abilities are the products of genetic inheritance as modified by Darwinian adaptation—without so much as a critical gulp. Though she is careful in some places to specify that she is drawing on this field merely to speculate, she seems not in the least bothered by the trenchant criticism to which it has been subjected from various quarters. It is deeply ironic that an argument insisting on a scientific standard in psychological research should cut such slack for a doctrine that is widely judged to be wholly unverifiable.

Harris's double standard—strict for data conflicting with her argument, lenient for data comporting with it—leaves *The Nurture Assumption* open to attack on one especially crucial point. In the opening sentence of her book (quoted earlier), the nurture assumption itself is defined as "the notion that a child's personality—what used to be called 'character'—is shaped or modified by the child's parents." No explanation is offered, here or elsewhere, for Harris's conflating of the terms "personality" and "character," and "character" does not even appear in her index. Plainly, however, she does not believe that character, in the sense of a continuing moral self that endures from context to context, is a legitimate term in any discussion of human behavior. Rather, what she believes, as she puts it in a crucial passage, is that "morality, like any other form of social behavior, is tied to the context in which it is acquired."

This issue, as I say, is a crucial one, involving the extent to which children carry the moral standards taught at home into their relationships outside, and whether, in a conflict between the two, the morality of the home will or will not trump the norms of the peer group. As we have seen in other contexts, Harris obviously thinks it will not.

Unfortunately, the sole evidence cited for this point, which is made several times in the book, is a 1928 study by H. Hartshorne and M.A. May called *Studies in Deceit*. In that study, by two researchers whom Harris describes as "ahead-of-their-time developmentalists," "children were given opportunities to cheat or steal in a variety of settings: at home, in the classroom, in athletic contests; alone or in the presence of peers." The ultimate finding, in Harris's paraphrase, was that "children who were honest in one context were not necessarily honest in others."

What the author of *The Nurture Assumption* does not tell us, though, is that (as Robert Wright has pointed out) a battle has raged over the Hartshorne-May study for decades. For those who believe that character does not exist, the study has come to have iconographic status. Others disagree. This is precisely the sort of social-scientific debate that Harris invokes time and again in other contexts to cast doubt on the nurture assumption. Yet in the case of *Studies in Deceit*, she is mute.

Why? The reason, one suspects, is that taking into account the dissent over Hartshorne-May would damage her insistence that in contests between parents and peers, peers will always win. *Do* children learn their moral standards at home and apply them even when they conflict with those of their peers? Or do they not? One cannot resolve this question simply by implying that just as children acquire their accents or styles of dress more from their peers than their parents, so they acquire other forms of behavior. (Indeed, this line of argument contains a causal fallacy of its own.) The question of what happens when a particular set of moral standards runs up against the beliefs of the peer group is a fascinating one, but it is a question that Harris ducks. That is no

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doubt why religion—which is at least one of the things we talk about when we talk about morality—makes only four, very brief, appearances in this heavily researched book.

What Harris would have us believe is that religion (in her analogy) is like cooking—it is something that "parents still have some power to give their kids" because it is for the most part confined to the home. This will not do. The phrase "resisting peer pressure" has entered the vernacular precisely because, *contra* Harris, children, and teenagers especially, are expected to carry with them their in-home moral standards—standards often based on religious principles. This matter is far too weighty, and its implications far too wide, to rest on the reed of a single study done over 60 years ago and still in dispute, and Harris's evasiveness on it is a telling lapse.

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Still, the fact that *The Nurture Assumption* falls short of shaking all of psychology to its foundations should not distract us from what Harris has accomplished. In her dogged questioning of an impressive number of studies, both professional and popular, she has put us in her debt. Some scholars may not stand in need of her remedial criticism, but others do. And as for the rest of her readers, especially those who come to her arguments with opinions of their own, they will surely be forced to think harder, and will in all likelihood come away feeling that they know both more and less than they thought they did. This is all to the good.

A number of Harris's critics fear that *The Nurture Assumption* will have the effect of discrediting not just discrete cases of shoddy research but the important work now being done on our most urgent social problems, first and foremost the ongoing disintegration of family life. Those critics have a point. But that is all the more reason for absorbing the lesson of Harris's book and evaluating with care what researchers tell us, perhaps especially when it appears to support our own views. Bad science in the service of a good cause is no service at all.

It is also feared that *The Nurture Assumption* is a book that will let parents off the hook, a license for self-indulgence issued to a society where adult self-indulgence already reigns—a society, as John Leo put it, "hip-deep in evidence of the pain and loss of underparented and unparented children." Here, too, the critics have a point. One does not have to invoke the prepubescent predators of the country's worst neighborhoods to see what Leo means: underparented and unparented children are scattered everywhere, from the barely supervised bands who crowd "after-care" programs in schools across the country to the shopping malls and fast-food joints where older children pass the time unattended because they are allowed to and because no one is waiting for them at home. And then there are the children in the better-off neighborhoods, children who can have anything they want—anything, that is, but a parent who will appear in the house before dark. In a world like this, again in Leo's words, it is "no time to celebrate a foolish book that justifies self-absorption and makes nonparenting a respectable, mainstream activity."

Yet there is, in truth, little in Harris's pages to justify this charge against her, and even less to give aid and comfort to anyone who would embrace such a low view of parenthood. To the contrary, on a number of contentious issues Harris's argument implies a position positively subversive of "nonparenting."

Consider day care. Harris devotes only two paragraphs to the subject, plainly out of a desire to avoid its coils, but those two paragraphs are instructive. In the past, she writes, "when only families with problems put their kids into day-care centers, institutional care was thought to be bad for children"; today, by contrast, when day-care centers are widely used by "normal" families, "it no longer seems to matter whether babies or preschoolers spend most of their daylight hours there or at home." What Harris means is that there is no evidence (as yet) that day care affects long-term personality development. But this is not at all the same thing as suggesting that it is all right to leave infants and small children in outside settings apart from their families for most of their waking hours.

In fact, evidence throughout *The Nurture Assumption* leads to quite the opposite conclusion. Recall what Harris has to say about the early years—that it is then and only then that parents can exercise "the one power" that "nearly all have": "they can determine who their children's peers are." It is precisely in those years that parental influence over children is, according to her own argument, at its peak.

Are parents who rely on day care exercising their power to choose peers for their children? Do they socialize with the parents of other children in the group, share their norms and aspirations, even know what is going on in their homes? One does not need to flog day care itself. Where I live, many parents hire nannies or other in-home help; most of the children being cared for in this way have peers chosen not by the parents but by the babysitters (typically, they are the children being baby-sat by the sitters' friends). The point is not that the choices are bad; it is that the sitters, and not the parents, are do-

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ing the choosing. Many parents have not the faintest idea whom their child has played with all day, and they know even less about what is going on in the playmate's home. If Harris is even partly right about the importance of peer groups, then parents who are outside the home during those preschool years need to think twice about what they are doing.

THERE IS much more in *The Nurture Assumption* to give pause to anyone tempted to embrace it for the wrong reasons, from Harris's baleful look at bilingual education—"a dismal failure," she writes, for reasons that group-socialization theory would have predicted—to her no less stringent critique of multiculturalism, a program which, by emphasizing the different ethnic and subcultural groups that children are already well aware of, undermines the task of education, which is to "unite students by giving them a common goal." Nor does she shrink from offering policy suggestions of her own, from school uniforms to a radical reform of the foster-care system.

In the end, however, it is not the practical implications of Harris's argument, intriguing though these may be, for which her book deserves to be read. Nor is it yet certain that *The Nurture Assumption* will end up representing a "turning point for psychology," as Steven Pinker predicts; in any case, that is for the psychologists to fight out. The rest of us, particularly the parents among us, are left with something else to ponder.

At its best, *The Nurture Assumption* presents parents with a unique moral challenge. The parent-child relationship, Harris suggests, is in one crucial respect like the relationship between husband and wife. Does it matter how you treat your spouse? Of course it does. Does it matter because you have the power to mold, shape, and influence your spouse's behavior? Or does it matter because, quite apart from any such end, marriage exerts its own moral claims? Harris's answer is phrased in subjective terms: "I don't expect that the way I act toward my husband is going to determine what kind of person he will be ten or twenty years from now. I do expect, however, that it will affect how happy he is to live with me and whether we will still be good friends in ten or twenty years."

What if it comes down to this: that the only thing we can control for certain—that, indeed, we have "great power to determine"—is the kind of life our children have at home? If that is so, then we should read to them not because it will help them get into Harvard, but because they like it; we should provide a loving environment not because it will stimulate their social or cognitive development, but because it is the right thing to do; we should try to stay together, at least while they are growing up, not because failing to do so will leave them with permanent psychological scars, but because it matters immediately to their happiness and well-being. And if all that is so, we should enjoy our children not because they exist to reward us, but because they are a joy. Is this so terrifying an idea—or one that lets parents off the hook?

Like many other mothers (and some fathers), I have consumed more than my share of the literature on "parenting" today, from the latest bulletins on jump-starting a toddler's fine motor control to the findings of the most recent White House conference on the importance of children's cognitive abilities. Some time ago, though, I realized I no longer cared to read this stuff—not simply because I had grown bored (though that is also true), but because, in its peculiar combination of joylessness and self-congratulation, it had become profoundly irritating. All that prattle about parental self-sacrifice, about sleepless nights, about the end of life as the once-childless knew it; all that preening insistence that what "we" do, from toilet training to bedtime rituals to inculcating the perfect amount of self-esteem, will somehow make or break "them"—so accustomed are we to this literature that we no longer question how end-driven it all is, how drearily focused on *results*, how utilitarian, how relentlessly, ruthlessly, teleological.

What is, to me, unexpectedly most admirable in Judith Rich Harris's work is its radical attempt to break free of the teleological—to force us to attend to the bond between parent and child in all its elemental simplicity. To "love according to my bond, nothing more, nothing less" may be the weightiest moral challenge most people will ever face. Shakespeare puts this famous phrase, tellingly, not in the mouth of a lover but in the mouth of a child speaking to her father. More even than the bond between husband and wife, the bond between parent and child, as Lear discovered too late, has at its very core this unconditional pledge of loyalty.

If only because it reminds us that we are stewards of our children, and not their Svengalis, *The Nurture Assumption* has performed a lasting cultural service. It defies comprehension that anyone could draw from this the lesson that how we treat them has thereby become a matter of indifference.

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What Are Little Boys Made Of?

Midge Decter

In certain neighborhoods of Brooklyn during the 1930's and 40's, an adolescent boy could never achieve truly high respect among his male friends unless he could hit a ball out of whatever was serving as a playing field and onto the next block. In those same days, in the small towns of the Middle West, a teenage boy could achieve no glory unless he was able to consume, and keep down, large quantities of alcohol. In both places, no doubt, being successful with girls, especially pretty girls, was an enviable accomplishment; but unaccompanied by the power of the bat (or jump shot) in the one case or the iron stomach in the other, it carried no real prestige.

The difference in those years between the striving of a boy in Brooklyn and the striving of a boy in, say, Aberdeen, South Dakota (the small town I once knew best because I had cousins there whom I used to visit) was certainly notable—but in the end, I think, it did not run all that deep. For what both cases suggest is the need for boys to create a standard of competitive excellence irrelevant to the standard set for them by the culture that will all too soon be taking control of their lives.

Ball-playing was, to be sure, far less dangerous to the health and well-being of the Brooklyn striver than was the competitive consumption of alcohol to his small-town counterpart. For obvious reasons: at the very least, playing ball does not end in automobile accidents that threaten life and limb. I am not sure why ball-playing would not have sufficed out on the prairie—or for that matter why alcohol should have played no part in Brooklyn. Perhaps it was that in the former, space to play was too easily come by, while in the latter alcoholics were a glut on the market; perhaps, that is, the substance of the competition itself had to be at a premium. I also find I cannot remember the primary means for being tested among the boys in my own home town, which was a respectable-sized Midwestern city; playing ball was probably part of it, as were daring the currents of the Mississippi in small boats and courting danger with automobiles (although not under the influence of alcohol).

But such niceties aside, the point is that there was certainly a whole lot of testing going on. In all cases, the standards being applied were immediate—you either achieved them or you did not—and measurable: three hits were unequivocally more than two, and a fifth of liquor was unequivocally more than a pint. One nowadays reads tales of drunken bingeing in campus fraternity houses that leads straight to the hospital emergency room. The small-town boys I used to know would have been contemptuous of such an idea. The object was to hold the stuff, not to be overtaken by it.

This need to establish a measurable means of

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earning the respect of one's peers was something quite alien to us girls. We were inclined to place ourselves within a circle of friendship based precisely on the making of allowances for one another's weaknesses. That is why our inevitable competitions tended to remain masked, and why we were such inveterate sharers of intimacies. That is also why, in later adolescence, when we were pleased to discover our considerable new power over boys, we were frightened by their alien need to be constantly testing their strength: against teachers and parents, which we could understand, but also against themselves, which we could not. Most chilling to us was the way they seemed willing to do it over and over again, even when they lost.

The time I am talking about was the period immediately before and during World War II, when boys not all that much older than we were enlisting in the Navy or getting drafted. By the end of the war or in its immediate aftermath, most of my male contemporaries would have made their way into one uniform or another; but before that event happened to them, the hope of serving, plus anxiety over the possible shame lest they be unable to do so, hung like a twin shadow over all their boyish pursuits. We girls, still comfortably far from our own forced debut into real life, dreamed the romance of war widowhood—learning to knit sweaters that were seldom finished, sending girlish letters to one APO or another, and in general miming high emotion. We were, in other words, still children, while the boys were being brought ever closer—closer than they themselves understood—to a man's estate. They would all too soon be in no need of making up contests.

But that, too, is not really the point. The point is that boys must always find some means to measure themselves, and the reason they must do so is that they are by nature pure of heart. By this I do not mean to suggest that they are not dirty, noisy, disruptive, and even violent. Or that there are not among them those who may sooner or later lie, cheat, and steal. But whether they are naughty or nice, troubled or troubling, what seems to be given to them along with their testosterone is an enormous degree of transparency.

Anyone who has ever watched little boys at play knows that whatever they are up to, for good or ill, their hearts are always on their sleeves. Little girls acquire wiles with practically their first step. They flirt, they pout, they manipulate. Watch a group of them at play, and what will be going on beneath their games is an instinctive feel for tactics and strategy worthy of the world's most practiced diplomats. Boys, by contrast, have no wiles. As the years go on, life will teach them not to cry when they want to, and to cover up their fear. But little boys almost never dissemble or manipulate—even their lies are transparent. Nor, as a rule, do they romanticize themselves, which is perhaps why millions upon millions of them could be sent into combat without becoming murderers.

SOMEWHERE ON the way to and from the 1960's, something happened in America to suppress this natural condition of boys: some loss of energy, some shying away from their instinctive restlessness and competitiveness, and, with it, a fading of whatever happened to be the standards of gallantry. It is not easy to say what brought this about—our mores of child-rearing certainly had a lot, if not everything, to do with it. In the end what really matters is that the process of damping their natures—which would prove so fateful, to them and to the rest of us, during the years of the Vietnam war—was applauded by the keepers of the national ethos: the intellectuals, the educators, the clergy, and the press.

So much so, that I used to find it very difficult to explain to my adolescent children what things were like when I was growing up. Whenever I tried, they took me to be chiding them in some way—and who could blame them? Had I not myself once done the same with my own parents? But the invidiousness that galled my children was history's doing, not mine. What I mean is that the condition of the country during World War II and its aftermath—the condition that was also responsible for the avalanche of children born more or less around the same time as mine—was no longer available to the postwar offspring. It had ceased to be.

During the war years, such things as love of country and service to country were—to use a recent happy contribution to the English language—a no-brainer. People believed that the United States was good and that its enemies were bad and needed to be roundly defeated. The government, the newspapers, radio, and Hollywood engaged in a concerted effort to reinforce that belief. Those who in the late 1930's had been opponents of American entry into the war slunk away in silence, while the most popular movie stars—those who were not in the armed forces, that is—traveled the land selling government bonds.

True, the public culture of those years primarily consisted of a lot of corny romancing; there are few popular artifacts from that time that do not now make one simply giggle with (fond) embarrass-

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ment. Yet there was a sense in which those movies and songs and books were not in the least meretricious. Underneath everything, they were expressions of a kind of unspoken recognition that this was a boys' time, governed by boys' standards. And it was our boys who were in the right, and who were winning.

It goes without saying that a lot of young men were killed in that war, and many returned home in bad shape. But consider: not a single poster or graffito defaming the government was to be seen in public places. There was no suggestion, except from a few hole-in-the-corner radicals, that the war itself had been anything but thoroughly just. For several years Washington had imposed a system of rationing of such commodities as gasoline, meat, and sugar, and yet there was only a very modest black market. War being war and fear being fear, no doubt there were soldiers who found themselves moved to do some very unpleasant things, but no press exposé or movie dwelled upon them in malicious triumph. Veterans returned to a country in which no new housing had been built in several years, and were forced to camp out for the time it took to catch up; yet there were no angry demonstrations on their part and nothing but warm embraces on the part of those required to take them in.

One cannot in decency say that it was joy to be alive at that hour—too many millions of innocent lives had been snuffed out—nor was it very heaven to be young (in truth, it never is). But Americans were having a rare and precious national experience in which for a time most things were felt to be in the right place and for the right reason.

A generation later, in the summer of 1969, long after I had given up trying to explain all this to my children, one of my daughters went on a youth tour to Israel and returned home in high excitement. Having grown up in a culture shot through with the manipulations of girlishness, she had discovered boys' country.

"Do you have any idea," she demanded, "what it feels like to be in a place where everybody loves the soldiers?"

"Yes," I told her, "I do."

The boys I grew up with had been presented with what they believed was a contest to end all contests, and in the face of it they were quickly able to put aside their adolescent means for self-testing. But what of *their* sons, all those young men who came of age in the 1960's, only to hide from Vietnam? Did they not feel the need to try themselves? Surely they did; they, too, after all, were boys. Something, however, kept a great many of them not only out of the Vietnam-era armed forces but, long before that, out of the entire game of serious and pure-hearted boyhood.

Indeed, many of the adolescent boys who swam into my ken in the 1960's, mainly as my daughters' classmates and companions, I often found at least bewildering and now and then downright heartbreaking. As everyone knows, the word from the world of adolescent psychology in those days was that this generation would be the first to be genuinely free and healthy, especially when it came to sex. But aside from whatever reservations I may have had about the virtue of this idea, I simply could not see how the boys my daughters and their friends were hanging out with could possibly be taking part in any Great Sexual Free-in. For the most part the sons of New York's aspiring middle and upper-middle class, they were well-kept and healthy enough, but they seemed to me so . . . frail. And as for the free and easy sex they were supposed to be enjoying, from the look of them it was not apparent how free it could be—or how easy, either. Sex, after all, to borrow from Mr. Dooley, ain't bean-bag.

One thing that marked these putative prodigies of sex was that they could not even bestir themselves to see their girlfriends home at the end of an evening. Nor had they been subjected to that propulsion-into-manliness of being *expected* to do so. My own never-enforced (because unenforceable) rule in this matter was greeted by my daughters first with puzzlement and then with derision, as if I had demanded that they dress in little starched pinafores and lisle stockings. But remember, I am speaking here about boys and girls in, of all places, the city of New York: far from the safest environment, one might have thought, in which a young man would want his would-be inamorata to travel alone after dark.

Another thing that marked the young in those days is that they tended to run in packs (I am told they still do), and without a scorecard you could not tell which two of them constituted a couple. It was as if the great new freedom they pretended to be asserting was freedom from and not freedom for. The boys, as I say, seemed very needy, not sexually but psychically, and the girls they hung around with often looked to be serving more as their mothers than as the objects of their lust. I do not mean to suggest that these kids remained chaste—everybody knows they did not—only that, as is so often the case with matters sexual, things were not quite as advertised. Just exactly how

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things were, it would take time and a fair amount of needless sorrow to figure out.

Whenever I think about what went wrong with the 60's young, a particular incident always comes to mind. My eldest daughter and some of her friends were going off to college, and a whole group of them had gathered one evening in our living room to say goodbye. A couple of young men from Columbia College were also there, one of whom was the longtime boyfriend of one of the girls. This young man's reputation had preceded him. It was said that he was a brilliant poet, deemed by common consent of the faculty to be the most gifted the college had seen in years. But if he was in fact a poet, he had clearly decided to impersonate Keats, dead at twenty-five. Slouched into one of our chairs, he promptly began to languish, shoulders hunched, arms dangling, hair draped over his face. He spoke (as young men in those days were wont to do) in breathy murmurs, as if it were too demanding of his energy to attempt to make himself heard.

My husband, who normally fled the scene when a young man appeared in the house, was on this occasion honoring his daughter by hanging around, and so was present when at some point the two Columbia boys began to carry on a mumbled conversation about the nature of existence, full of the day's confused profundities and clearly intended to signal their own incomprehensible brilliance to their admiring auditors. Not until my husband, himself a onetime Columbia boy, was moved to ask our young poet if he had never been told by any of his famously distinguished professors that the sorts of things he was saying were the purest bullshit did the young man—as it seemed for the first time in his life—snap alert, sit up straight, brush his hair out of his eyes, and spend the balance of the evening engaged in genuine conversation. I could not believe my eyes. Finally it occurred to me that, in his own way, this child had been just as much abandoned by his world as any Harlem urchin by his.

Shortly after that evening, our poet was all too predictably to lie his way out of being drafted into the army. If memory serves, he first thought of claiming to be a conscientious objector, but upon learning that he would be required to perform some kind of communal service declared he could not possibly spend his time taking orders from some bureaucrat and instead found some psychiatrist to declare him mentally ill.

There were psychiatrists aplenty willing to offer such service to the boys otherwise eligible to serve in the Vietnam war. Failing that solution, a good number of others took themselves off to Canada or Sweden. Their whole universe—their parents, their teachers, their doctors, and even in a sense the draft boards themselves—connived with these boys in their escape from duty. In further aid of this escape, the culture surrounding them engaged in the obverse of what had been done for the boys of World War II: it declared those who served in the war, rather than those who ran away from it, immoral and even criminal.

Since God is not mocked, there was surely some kind of price to pay for having flubbed even so generally ill-regarded a test. Perhaps the price was a subtle one, paid in a slow sapping of *amour propre* for years and years to come. But what we do know is that by the time the war was over, a change had come over the women whom nature and nurture had intended for these young men. *They* were now throwing themselves into a movement whose main source of ideological energy was an abiding contempt for the male sex.

AND NOW still another generation has passed. Those who were once the boys of the 60's have long since returned from their various forms of self-imposed exile and for the most part become successful and affluent beyond the reasonable hopes of man. And every day they climb onto or into machines designed to keep them, as they say, "in shape," but whose deep-down function may be to provide a simulation of testing that will enable them to make the grade at long last. What of *their* little boys—the generation of the new millennium?

From the look of it, they have been abandoned to their own brand of danger. But there is this difference. After a quarter-century of almost exclusive concern with girls—their sorrows, their strengths, their needs, their thought and speech patterns, and even the configurations of their brains—those who stand at the gates of culture have begun to pay attention to boys, and to see them as something other than foils for their female counterparts.

It is never easy to figure out just how such a shift in interest comes about. Perhaps the explanation for this new focus is something as simple as plain saturation. The social theorist Robert Nisbet once pointed out that the most underrated force in human affairs is boredom. We may just have reached the point where the feminists feel that one more study of the female whatever would put even them to sleep—Gloria Steinem herself may be having trouble keeping her eyes open. Whatever the reason for it, boys and their problems are lately becoming all the professional rage.

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But, it seems necessary to ask, to what end? Take, for example, the squirmers. It seems recently to have come to the attention of the people in charge of educating them that a great many young boys find it difficult to sit still for very long, thereby creating certain problems in the classroom. Beyond that, their restlessness often results in paper work so sloppy as to be nearly illegible, a difficulty many of their teachers find most disturbing. The problem having been brought to the attention of the experts, a few million boys have been diagnosed as suffering from a serious neurological condition known as attention-deficit disorder (ADD); and, to the great relief of bored and incompetent schoolteachers, the experts have further prescribed that the condition be brought under control with a substance called Ritalin (street name: speed). For some strange reason, taking this amphetamine has the effect of quieting young boys.

What other effect it may be having on them is a subject to which no one seems yet to have given any thought—any more than the psychiatrists who once secured exemptions from duty for these boys' fathers gave a thought to what other consequences might be lying in wait for *them*. Which raises an urgent question: how much of the current attention to boys can be said to be loving of them as they are truly constituted to be?

The question is especially pertinent in the case of a recent and highly praised book, *Real Boys*.* Its author, William Pollack, is the director of the Center for Men at McLean Hospital outside Boston and a member of the faculty at Harvard Medical School. Pollack offers for our consideration the case histories of a series of troubled adolescent males he has interviewed and/or treated. As a result of listening to them and their families, he writes, he has arrived at the insight that essentially all the problems experienced by boys in our society stem from the fact that at much too early a point in their lives, they are thrust out of the arms of their mothers.

Now, on the evidence of this book, William Pollack is certainly a tender interlocutor, especially with boys in whom he sees a need for tenderness. But as for insight, why could it not as justly be contended, and on the basis of Pollack's own examples, that these boys' problem is not mothers but fathers—that is, that they may be suffering from the lack of manly instruction? So at least it has been contended, and by people of discernment, about the troubled and troublesome boys of the inner-city ghetto, who cannot be totally of another breed.

This is just another way of saying that all of it—the Ritalin, the research, the insight—may well be irrelevant to the quiddity of little boys, and particularly of little boys in trouble. After two generations' worth of social and cultural suppression, they continue to be in exactly the same condition: by nature pure of heart, and in need of some answering purity of heart, they have been left with scarcely any good way either to be wholly themselves or to be assured that they are indeed on the way to becoming men.

At its very bleakest, the denial of this condition has meant bloody murder. Literally. Since the 60's, the juvenile suicide rate in this country has doubled and redoubled. To anyone for whom this is merely a cold statistic, let me illustrate it with a few gaudy examples. Only a few years ago, in a single region of New York State comprising about 100 square miles, eight boys between the ages of twelve and fifteen killed themselves within four months. It was held by some that this epidemic may have been a case of "copycatting": another spate of adolescent suicides had recently occurred in the town of Plano, Texas. Yet it seems quite unlikely that the New York boys would have heard of the Texans, or for that matter were even aware of one another. Perhaps, rather than being cases of copying, all these suicides had something very grave in common. If so, no one was able to figure out what it might have been, the psychologists least of all. Of one of the New York boys it was said that his parents were too neglectful, of another that his parents were driving him too hard to achieve.

The same bafflement attended the news this past October that, within the space of two weeks, two Columbia students had killed themselves and a third stabbed himself twice in the chest and barely survived. Of course, all suicides must in the end necessarily remain a mystery. Why do some people let themselves be blown away by the first cold breeze, while others survive calamity upon calamity? But about children who have not even lived out the first quarter of their lives, surely there has to be something more to say.

One point to take note of is that the majority of youthful suicides are committed by males. Girls threaten suicide more often than boys, and even go on to attempt it, but with a high degree of frequency their attempts are carried out it in such a way as to secure their rescue. (Alas, not high enough: one of the Columbia students was a young woman.) Boys sometimes do the same; but for the most part, not being naturally manipulative, if they

*Random House, 398 pp., $24.95.

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set out to kill themselves, there is a high probability they will succeed.

And then, in another addition to the repertoire, there is mass murder: a boy turns up at school with a gun and picks off a few of his fellow students and maybe a teacher. This has recently happened, with varying numbers of victims, in Moses Lake, Washington; Bethel, Alaska; Pearl, Mississippi; West Paducah, Kentucky; Jonesboro, Arkansas; and Springfield, Oregon.

The first of these rampages took place in February 1996, the latest in May 1998. The most successful of them, numerically speaking, was the work of two boys aged thirteen and eleven who before they were stopped had managed to kill five and wound ten. Their success may be attributable to the fact that they acted according to a plan: the younger of the boys sneaked into the school building and set off a fire alarm, the elder shot the victims one by one as they filed out of doors. Their closest rival was a fifteen-year-old from Springfield, Oregon, who, working less systematically, killed only four, two of them his sleeping parents, but succeeded in wounding 22 of his fellow students as they were eating lunch in the school cafeteria. One of the boys told interviewers that he had acted as if in a dream, but most of the others confessed to having harbored feelings of rage.

If adolescent suicide is in the end mystifying to the experts, adolescent murder, especially if it involves a mass of victims, somehow seems not to confuse them. Thus, before the blood had dried, it was announced that the boys in question were depressed—no doubt a perfectly unimpeachable judgment if also a perfectly unenlightening one, depression being the diagnosis for a wide assortment of human ills, from small to great. Next, no less predictably, it was said that the boys had had too easy access to guns—a view held by many people who seem to believe that because guns are necessary for shootings, they are themselves the agents of shootings.

To be sure, there have been many dreadful accidents with guns in the hands of little children who no doubt had too easy access to them. But the boys in these schoolyard incidents were out to cause suffering and death; had there been no guns available to them, the results would obviously have been far less horrific but their intentions not one bit less murderous. What moved those seven boys to take those guns into their hands is a question to which the anti-gun reflex is no answer.

Next came the pronouncement that the boys had clearly fallen under the influence of the violence that surrounded them in the music they heard and the movies and television they watched and the computer and television games they played. Such a charge is hard to resist: the unremitting stream of ugly junk with which the senses of today's young are assaulted morning, noon, and night—hardly offset by the pap that passes for their education—must at the very least act like a slow poison on their nervous systems. But that, too, cannot by itself be a short, straight road to murder, or else the whole country would be nothing but a charnel house.

What can with assurance be concluded about the rampagers in the schoolyard is that they are obviously crazy—or as the experts prefer to put it, "seriously disturbed." Just as obviously, however, they are crazy *boys*. Everybody knows that girls, who inhabit the same low youth culture, would never do what they did. The violence of girls is not only rare but is almost always committed in packs; there is virtually no such thing as a lone outlaw female. Besides, when a girl is out to have a really destructive tantrum, it is usually herself she goes after, doing such things as starving herself or pulling out her hair. Those boys were being boys, only much—murderously much—more so.

AS ANYONE with eyes in his head can tell you, all little boys love to play with guns. If they are deprived of the opportunity—by their socially overenlightened mothers, for instance—they will make a weapon of any facsimile at hand, whether pencils, spoons, sticks, or even just their index fingers. If allowed to be themselves, boys also like to fight, usually as just a mode of horseplay but sometimes for real. Perhaps above all, they like to be bad, at least now and then, as a kind of masculine badge of honor.

It is nowadays very difficult for a boy to grow up with masculine honor in this society. For one thing, he is standing at the tail-end of a veritable whirlwind of anti-male sentiment that has been sweeping through the country for decades; although the force of this sentiment has somewhat let up, it has left in its wake a vast collection of moral and spiritual debris for any boy to pick his way through. For another thing, he has been deprived of any healthy means of meeting hostility with hostility, for he is also bereft of most of the ordinary, which is to say noncriminal, ways of being a bad boy. The obscene language with which he might once, say, have scandalized his parents has become commonplace, as has the kind of talk about sex that might once have given him and his playmates a *frisson* of serious naughtiness: in school itself, and from a very early

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age, he is vouchsafed instruction into the arcana of sexual behavior that would otherwise be beyond his imagining.

Perhaps most of all, the possibility of participating in some straightforward means of testing has been corrupted by enlightenment. Ball-playing, for example, is now done in organized leagues whose underlying intention is to provide everyone with a simulacrum of self-esteem. As if kids were too dumb to tell good performance from bad, it has become common practice for parents and other spectators to cheer for every play by every member of every team, win or lose. Nor does such a boy have the means of testing his mettle through the performance of some genuinely responsible work. He has, so to speak, no wood to chop and no water to draw, and he earns no money that is necessary to keeping a roof over his family's head.

To top it off, a quarter-century ago his government decided that he would no longer be subject to the requirement of serving in the defense of his country. Should he voluntarily wish to do so, he will be greeted not only with open arms but with the promise of many emoluments, primary among them the hope of a better future career as a civilian. Once upon a time an American boy might be accosted by a poster—now a standard bit of junk chic found in flea markets—with the picture of a stern figure pointing a long and bony finger and the caption, "Uncle Sam needs YOU!" Today he will see on television a scenic commercial with the slogan, "Be All You Can Be." Not, help defend your country, or even your family. Not, discover the strength in being attached to something larger than you. Not, be a brave man, or be a good man, or even just be a man. Only, prepare yourself for a better career—the slogan of a country that has forgotten the natural purity of a boy's heart.

Finally, short of murder and mayhem, he is not likely to undergo serious punishment for wrongdoing. If he is disruptive at school, he is much less likely to be punished in the sight of all his buddies than to be drugged or sent into therapy. This last bar to self-respect is a bequest from the boys of the 1960's, who rioted and trashed and burned their universities, and found the means to duck out on their responsibilities to their nation, with only a minor inconvenience, if any, to themselves and with the din of adult praise in their ears. (One of them, after all, even made his way into the presidency.)

In short, by virtue of the ease into which he is born, an American boy is on the one hand infantilized and on the other hand deprived, by a let-it-all-hang-out culture, of his God-given right to the comforting innocence of childhood. Considering what life is like for hundreds of millions of children living elsewhere in the world, it would be unholy to feel too sorry for him. But raging schoolyard murder and galloping suicide, even though they are the exception, beg for some understanding beyond what is feebly offered by the professionals of mental health.

IN 1960, Paul Goodman, the radical social philosopher, published what would turn out to be his most influential book. It was called *Growing Up Absurd*.* The book said much that turned out to be dangerous, but also some things that turned out to be prophetic, the most prophetic of all being its first sentence: "It's hard to grow up when there isn't enough man's work."

Goodman was referring here to those basic forms of labor that modern society had ruled out: building yourself a shelter, taking your own food from the ground. This nostalgia may have been a little foolish, or simply irrelevant. Also, he had no way of knowing that all too soon, the very words "man's work" would elicit shrieks of feminist horror and then simply be placed under interdiction. And Goodman in his own way contributed to making growing up even harder, for the anarchism of the counterculture that owed so much to his inspiration turned out to be a flight from manliness that put all other flights to shame—and drove Goodman himself, be it said, to near-despair.

Still, he was onto something. It is hard for a boy to grow up without feeling the need for a uniquely masculine form of striving. All the more so in a culture where his expectations for work will almost certainly include work that girls will be doing as well (even should he look forward to becoming a steelworker); where his sex life will, so to speak, fall into his lap; and where even his military experience, should he decide to have any, will take place in a thoroughly feminized atmosphere. In his heart of hearts, that place of purity and no dissembling, he may perhaps forever harbor a dream of dangers passed and difficulties conquered—a dream no girl or woman will ever share with him or even, in her own heart of hearts, ever understand or perhaps forgive. But what is to become of him?

One may not pray for him to be tested in war as his grandfather was. But is it too much to pray that he will, without exploding, find places to go where only boys go and things to do that only boys can understand and, if he proves good enough, genuinely admire?

* The book was published in three installments in COMMENTARY.

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Thinking About the Unthinkable in the Middle East

Gabriel Schoenfeld

By the eve of the Six-Day war of 1967, after over a decade of intensive effort, Israel had succeeded in building a small number of nuclear weapons. Such weapons have been part of its arsenal ever since, giving the country a monopoly in the Middle East and a vital if problematic edge in its ongoing struggle for survival. But, in a profound shift in the regional military balance, that monopoly is about to be lost.

This is a matter of cardinal importance to Israel's future—at least as important as the arrangements it will conclude with the Palestinians under Yasir Arafat. And yet the issue of nuclear weapons has seldom been raised in public discussion of the Middle East conflict, in part because Israel itself has blanketed it in layers of secrecy and military censorship and in part, no doubt, because the possibilities it evokes are simply too terrifying to think about. Nevertheless, for any appreciation of the unfolding strategic map of the Middle East, a grasp of the nuclear dimension is essential. A new book, *Israel and the Bomb*, by the Israeli political scientist Avner Cohen,* offers a timely account of the crucial first two decades of Israel's nuclear program and a stepping-stone into thinking about the unthinkable in the Middle East.

When Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion pushed his country onto the atomic path in the early 1950's, nuclear weapons were perceived as a vital shortcut to national defense. Israel's population then stood at fewer than two million, outnumbered thirtyfold by the Arab states; in territory, Israel occupied a mere 7,800 square miles as against the Arabs' 3.4 million. What these huge disparities meant in military terms was, as Ben-Gurion put it, that Israel "could not afford to lose any round, whereas the Arabs could afford to lose them all."

Of course, nuclear weapons were never regarded as a substitute for conventional military might. Nor did Israel set out to acquire them with any clearly delineated strategic doctrine in mind. With the shadow of the Holocaust and the Arab campaign of annihilation of 1948 still looming large, the bomb was seen as a partial fix to the country's overwhelming vulnerability—and also a way for the Jewish state to guarantee its existence on its own without outside help. At the very least, Arab leaders would be forced to think twice before waging war on a country armed with weapons whose terrible power had been demonstrated to the world at Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Yet acquiring a nuclear capability was anything but a simple task. It would be hard to overstate, to begin with, the staggering financial cost of the effort. Although, as Cohen writes, precise estimates are not available, for comparison's sake one need only think of the company that then-underdeveloped Israel was joining when it finally entered the

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* Columbia University Press, 432 pp., $27.50.

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nuclear club in 1967: the U.S. and the USSR, England and France, Communist China. From the late 1950's through the mid-1960's, vast resources were diverted into the Negev desert to build the Dimona reactor and the accompanying plutonium-processing plant where the weapons themselves were to be fabricated. If senior officers of the Israel Defense Force (IDF) were kept in the dark about the project, it was not only to ensure secrecy but because Dimona was necessarily siphoning funds that might otherwise have gone to Israel's conventional military forces.

The costs in political capital were no less great. Ever since its inception, Israel's nuclear program has periodically given rise to friction with the United States. This was especially so in the 1960's, when both the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, in their determination to restrict the global proliferation of nuclear weapons, made no attempt to distinguish between friend and foe. Intent on stopping Israel from "going nuclear," both administrations turned the screws on Jerusalem with vehemence.

Because Israel has yet to concede it is a nuclear power—it has refused to sign the 1968 Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), abiding instead by the oft-repeated assertion that it will not be the first to introduce nuclear weapons into the Middle East—the pressure on it to renounce its nuclear option continues to flare up from time to time. Among its Arab neighbors, Egypt in particular has vociferously raised the issue in international forums year in and year out, accusing the United States of hypocrisy for not compelling its client to sign the NPT while (presumably) holding all other countries to account. And the bomb has naturally also figured in the various campaigns of demonization and delegitimation that have been Israel's unique lot in the world, adduced as further evidence of its allegedly hegemonic and even genocidal ambitions toward its hapless Arab neighbors.

As IT happens, what the actual effect of Israel's nuclear monopoly has been on the power equation in the Middle East is not so easy to specify. In the early 1960's, the nuclear facility at Dimona figured prominently in the threatening speeches of the Egyptian dictator Gamal Abdel Nasser. This gave rise to concern both in Israel and in Washington that Egypt itself might be on the verge of embarking on nuclearization, thus setting off an atomic arms race in the Middle East. While that particular peril never materialized—Egypt has, so far as is known, never moved down the road toward nuclear weapons in any significant way—a case can be made that, to some degree, Israel's program did figure in Nasser's decision to go to war in 1967.

Nasser first publicly threatened Israel with war over Dimona in 1960, when construction was still under way. Over the next six years, he repeated the threat incessantly, and, in the immediate run-up to the Six-Day war, sent Egyptian MiG-21's into Israeli air space to carry out high-altitude reconnaissance over the facility even as he was also closing the Straits of Tiran to Israeli shipping. To Israel's then-prime minister, Levi Eshkol, these overflights suggested that an Egyptian move to bomb the Dimona reactor might well be the final preparation for a "full military assault." And indeed, according to Avner Cohen, "Egyptian maps and contingency plans for offensive operations, found in air bases in the Sinai [by Israel after the war], confirmed that aerial bombing of Dimona was a primary Egyptian objective."

Obviously, a great many considerations entered into Israel's decision to strike preemptively on June 5, 1967, but it is still insufficiently appreciated how deeply the need to protect Dimona may have affected its calculations, just as the desire to eliminate Dimona had affected Nasser's. To say this, however, is merely to underline the difficulty of assessing accurately the relative costs and benefits that the possession of nuclear weapons brings to any country that is party to a conflict—costs and benefits that in any case are as much political and psychological as military.

Take, for example, Israel's relationship with the superpowers. Once Jerusalem had the bomb, the Kremlin was arguably forced to exercise a certain restraint in its maneuvering for influence in the Middle East, lest actions by Soviet clients provoke a nuclear response from Israel and/or set in motion an escalating conflagration ending in an explosive clash between the superpowers. Moreover, as the IDF's strategic reach increased, Moscow could not altogether exclude the possibility that Israel, if pressed to the wall by a direct Soviet military intervention, might in desperation bring the house down on top of itself by hitting the USSR with nuclear weapons in a variant of the so-called "Samson option."

Then there was the United States. In the period during which it was most anxious to prevent Israel from obtaining nuclear weapons, it found itself with a strong incentive to supply Jerusalem with conventional arms instead; as declassified American documents reveal, these arms were the carrot that accompanied the stick of U.S. pressure on Israel not to go nuclear. And after the late 1960's, when it seemed clear Israel had in fact become a nuclear-weapons state, the need was even greater to make certain that, in a crisis, the country would be strong

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enough to defend itself without having to escalate to the nuclear stage.

As for shaping relations with its immediate neighbors, nuclear weapons have again had a certain utility for Israel, though hardly in a uniform way. Clearly, many of the threats Israel has regularly faced have not been influenced one way or another by the fact that it is a nuclear power. Atomic weapons are of no value in deterring or responding to guerrilla incursions, car bombings, and the like, and they have been equally useless in contending with larger incidences of violence of the kind that have periodically erupted in southern Lebanon or the West Bank. The real issue is whether Israel's nuclear forces have been useful in deterring or containing full-scale war.

Basing oneself on the experience of 1967, one might be tempted to answer no. After all, as we have seen, Israel's nuclear program—and, much as Nasser was alarmed by it, he did not yet know with any certainty how far along it had come—may have had just the opposite effect, becoming a factor not in deterring but in precipitating conflict. But by the time of the Yom Kippur war of October 1973, things stood very differently.

By then, the perception had become widespread that Israel did have or was close to acquiring a small nuclear arsenal. Although that perception did not stop Egypt and Syria from planning and launching a major act of aggression, the Arabs' strategy was not designed, as it always had been previously, to achieve the maximal goal of finishing off the Jewish state altogether. Rather, it was aimed at recapturing specific territory conquered by Israel six years earlier.

Once again a great many factors can be adduced to account for the way the 1973 war unfolded and especially for the limited nature of Arab aims. Preeminent among them was surely Israel's well-deserved reputation for mastery of conventional warfare. But at the same time, the Arab assault may also have been calibrated to come in below any threshold that might seem likely to invite a nuclear response.

Even more significantly, after 1973, as the existence of Israel's nuclear option became a more widely accepted proposition, a marked change began to be visible in the behavior of the bordering Arab states. Though Israel still remained in possession of territory it had taken in the Six-Day war, and though the question of Palestinian refugees and Palestinian self-rule continued to agitate Arab opinion, there were no subsequent attempts to address these matters by all-out force of arms, let alone to destroy Israel entirely. On the contrary, for the first time, both Egypt and Jordan began to advance along a different path, engaging in negotiations, establishing diplomatic relations, and even concluding peace agreements with the Jewish state. What part in all this was played by Israel's possession of a nuclear arsenal must necessarily remain speculative, but we do know something: in 1977, President Anwar Sadat of Egypt confided to his Israeli interlocutors that his precedent-shattering decision to seek peace had been deeply influenced by just this fact.

In short, Israel's nuclear weapons do appear to have in some sense fulfilled the function Ben-Gurion had in mind for them. By bolstering Israel's image as an invincible military power despite its permanent inferiority in materiel and numbers of men under arms, these weapons have helped to persuade its neighbors that in a full-fledged war nothing would be gained and everything could be lost. In that sense, they have also succeeded in imparting a measure of stability to the world's most volatile region.

THIS, HOWEVER, is exactly the situation that is about to be turned upside down.

Over the last several years, cadres of unemployed but highly skilled nuclear engineers have dispersed to the corners of the earth from the lands of the now-dissolved Soviet Union; fissionable material, laxly secured in the chaos of the past decade, may in some cases have traveled with them. At the same time, Moscow's need for cash has led it to sell sophisticated nuclear technology, including reactors, to less than stable countries on its periphery.

The former USSR is hardly the only offending proliferator. Both Communist China and North Korea have shown themselves willing to provide lethal technologies, including the means to deliver nuclear weapons, to the highest bidder. This past May, Pakistan, a recipient of considerable help from both China and North Korea, conducted a series of underground nuclear blasts, becoming the first Islamic state to wield the atomic bomb.

In the Middle East itself, three of the countries most consumed with hatred of Israel—Libya, Iran, and Iraq—have been intent on obtaining nuclear weapons for decades. The last two have now made significant progress toward that end. This past July, a commission formed by Congress and headed by former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld concluded that once Iran manages to acquire the necessary materials, it will be within three years of building a nuclear weapon. That Iran will soon possess the means to deliver such weapons is common knowledge; in July, it tested the Shahab-3, a modified version of a North Korean missile with a range that extends to Israel and beyond.

Iraq, for its part, would long since have possessed

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nuclear arms had its program not been interrupted by Israel's aerial strike against the Osirak "research" facility in 1981. Interrupted, but not halted: a decade later, in the wake of the Gulf war, both the CIA and United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM) inspectors were shocked to discover that shortly after the invasion of Kuwait in August 1990, Baghdad had embarked on a crash program to produce a nuclear device. It was proceeding along a technological path—the use of electromagnetic devices called "calutrons" to enrich uranium—that Western experts had simply not foreseen, and was utilizing fuel that had been surreptitiously removed from a reactor supposedly under International Atomic Energy Agency "safeguards." Before the calutrons were discovered (along with the principal Iraqi nuclear-weapons design center at Al Atheer, a facility unknown to and not targeted by the U.S. during the war), the CIA had erroneously forecast that Iraq was ten years away from developing an operational nuclear weapon. In fact, it was only six months to a year short of finishing the job.

In the opinion of the Rumsfeld commission in July, it would now take Saddam Hussein several years to reconstitute the nuclear-production facilities destroyed in the Gulf war and its immediate aftermath. More recently, however, revelations by Scott Ritter, the American inspector who resigned from UNSCOM in protest against U.S. interference with its mission, suggested that Iraq had maintained three or four "implosion devices" requiring only a fissionable core to become fully operational, twenty-kiloton nuclear bombs. If Iraq managed to obtain the requisite quantity of plutonium or enriched uranium—the Rumsfeld commission acknowledged that Iraq may have hidden some fissile materials from the UN inspectors—it could have a nuclear weapon within a matter of weeks. On the assumption that Saddam Hussein will continue successfully to conceal his nuclear facilities from UN inspectors, the only further question is how much trouble Iraq would have mounting its first-generation nuclear weapons on the Scud missiles it is reported by UNSCOM to have secretly kept in reserve.

SO IT is only a matter of time—perhaps a very brief time—before Israel's nuclear monopoly will draw to an end. What sort of dynamic will then be introduced into the Middle East?

As far back as the 1970's, in anticipation of things to come, students of military strategy debated the likely effect of a balance of nuclear terror in the Middle East. Some were strikingly sanguine about it. Here, for instance, was the view of Robert W. Tucker in a widely discussed COMMENTARY article:

> We have no persuasive reason for believing that, in a nuclear environment, the major Arab countries would behave irrationally. We do have every reason for believing they will have every inducement to behave with marked circumspection. . . . Far from proving destabilizing, a nuclear balance between Israel and the major Arab states would have a stabilizing effect. On the Arab side, there would no longer be reason to fear that Israel might be tempted to use its nuclear deterrent for expansionist purposes. On the Israeli side, the present preoccupation with secure borders could markedly diminish. On both sides, the will to resort to a military solution of differences would decline and, in time, disappear.*

To temper this upbeat forecast, Tucker added an important caveat: he was assuming, he wrote, "that the nuclear forces of both sides would be second-strike forces"—that is, capable of surviving an enemy attack—and "that the technical nature of the force structures would not be such as to generate a new, and compelling, instability."

Tucker's optimistic view may or may not have been reasonable in 1975. Looking at the picture of the Middle East today, however, one wonders if any portion of what he had to say applies to the situation at hand. The two powers in the region most likely to acquire nuclear weapons are not moderate nations of the kind Tucker plainly had in mind in speaking of the "major Arab states," but rather the outlaw states of Iran and Iraq. It is a real question whether either of them can be expected to "behave with marked circumspection" under any circumstances, let alone when they become militarily far stronger than they now are. How a nuclear rivalry between Israel and such radically hostile countries can have a "stabilizing effect" is difficult to see.

A key underpinning of any stable balance of terror is the presumption of rationality—the one quality that seems in exceptionally scant supply in either the rhetoric or the behavior of the leadership of Iran and Iraq. Consider, for example, a recent pronouncement of Ayatollah Yusuf Sani'i, a senior member of Iran's ruling council:

> All religious persons and Islamic leaders must encourage and teach the value of the deed of suicide. We ask God to illuminate all Muslims and to seat all the fallen in the first row, particularly the most courageous martyrs who were killed in suicide actions.

* "Israel and the United States: From Dependency to Nuclear Weapons," November 1975.

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Or consider, in the case of Iraq, Saddam Hussein's use of poison gas against his own citizens in 1988; his willingness to put Iraq's armed forces and a good part of its national infrastructure at risk of destruction by American airpower for the sake of digesting an Arab neighbor; or his threats "to make fire burn half of Israel" and his hurling of Scud missiles into the heart of Tel Aviv.

It is possible, to be sure, to argue that in one sense both Iran and Iraq do indeed behave rationally; after all, after having committed or encouraged violence and mayhem of the most extreme kind, they seem not only to have gotten away with it but to be doing relatively well. But this is exactly the form of rationality that could end in a nuclear exchange. Just as Israel now confronts suicide bombers willing to give up their own lives in the hope of taking large numbers of Israeli civilians with them, we may soon see the emergence of suicide states, willing to sacrifice huge portions of their own populace for the sake of "liberating" Palestine. Faced with enemies like these, Israel may find itself in a novel position of uncertainty as to whether its own threat of a nuclear response would be adequate to maintain deterrence. Where such matters are concerned, uncertainty is not good enough.

HOW TO diminish the uncertainty? Already in the 1960's, Yigal Allon, the Israeli politician and military strategist, added an amendment to Israel's traditional formula: Israel, he said, would not be the first country to introduce nuclear weapons into the Middle East, but it would also not be the second. By striking Iraq's Osirak reactor in 1981, Israel made it utterly clear that this aspect of its doctrine was not merely theoretical.

Now, once again, the question has arisen of what forcible steps Israel might take in order to deny nuclear weapons to its enemies. This past September, Ephraim Sneh, a general in the Israeli army reserves and a leading member of the opposition Labor party, spoke publicly of the possibility that the IDF might be compelled to "deliver a conventional counterstrike or preemptive strike" against Iranian atomic facilities. This was not long after Teheran tested its Shahab-3 missile—to the yawns of the international community—and then displayed the missile in a military parade with banners draped from it reading, "Israel should be wiped from the map"—to still more yawns by the international community. Sneh was roundly criticized at home for his remarks, not because he was wrong but because, as Uzi Landau, the chairman of the Knesset's foreign-affairs and security committee, explained, "unnecessary chatter" could heighten the likelihood of Israel's being targeted for attack.

But whether or not Sneh should have spoken out, the option he referred to may be less viable than it once was. Both Iran and Iraq have already taken measures—concealment, dispersion, hardening, surface-to-air defense—to ensure that the feat performed by Israel's air force in 1981, and for which it was universally condemned at the time, including by the United States, could not easily be repeated.

If preemption is largely ruled out as an option, what then? To reduce its vulnerability—enemy missiles can arrive within ten minutes from firing—Israel may well be compelled to adopt a "launch-on-warning" posture for both its conventional and nuclear forces. For the purpose of considering this eventuality, we may assume that Israel has indeed developed a secure retaliatory force of the kind Tucker saw as essential to stability. Even so, however, this would not offer much reassurance. Unlike its neighbors, and unlike the U.S., Israel is a tiny country, and in a nuclear environment it would not have the luxury of waiting to assess the damage from a first strike before deciding how to respond.

Thus, in any future crisis, at the first hint from satellite intelligence or some other means that a missile fusillade was being prepared from, say, Iran or Iraq, Israel, to protect its populace, would have to punch first. And it would have to strike not only at missile sites, some of which it might well miss, but at a broader range of targets—communications facilities, air bases, storage bunkers, and all other critical nodes—so as to paralyze the enemy and thus rule out the possibility of attack. These are the implications of launch-on-warning.

Clearly, such a posture presents grave problems. Lacking secure second-strike forces of their own, and aware that Israel would no doubt try to hit them preemptively, Iran and Iraq would be under tremendous pressure to launch their missiles first—to "use them or lose them." In other words, what this scenario leads to is the prospect of both sides' moving to a permanent position of hair-trigger alert. It is a nightmarish prospect. The possibility that nuclear war might break out at any moment—by accident, miscalculation, or design—would inevitably place an intolerable strain on Israel's freedom of military movement, and take a no less heavy toll on civilian morale.

In part, no doubt, because of just such considerations, Israel has been attempting to find other, more palatable solutions to its strategic dilemma—first and foremost by developing a system of defense against ballistic missiles. Here the weapon of choice

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is the surface-to-air Arrow missile, an American-funded device that promises to be far more effective at intercepting incoming projectiles than the Patriot, an anti-missile battery which, though heralded by American generals during the Gulf war for its prowess at shooting down Scuds, was shown in post-mortems to have been of severely limited effectiveness. The Arrow is still being tested and is expected to be deployed sometime in the year 2000.

But while the Arrow is necessary, it can hardly be said to be sufficient. Even if it works as advertised, it cannot be counted on to serve as a truly impermeable shield. An aggressor could attempt to overwhelm it, for example, by saturating the sky with missiles and decoys. A single missile with a nuclear payload that managed to penetrate the Arrow's defensive wall would be one missile too many: a twenty-kiloton nuclear weapon bursting over Tel Aviv (population 1,139,000) would deal an unfathomable blow to Israel's national life.

Of course, the Arrow system is not the last word in defensive technology, and a number of complementary approaches hold the potential of offering more effective protection down the road. Among the most promising are space-based systems that target enemy missiles in their boost phase—that is, when they are at their most vulnerable, moving at slow speeds and emitting intensely hot and highly visible plumes, and also still ascending over the territory of the country that launched them.

WHILE a space-based system is beyond Israel's financial and technological means, it is not beyond ours, and we ourselves happen to be in dire need of one. Not only are our shores already completely vulnerable to intercontinental ballistic-missile attack from Russia and China, we will soon be naked to assault from a number of third-world countries as well. According to the Rumsfeld commission report, North Korea and Iran will be "able to inflict major destruction on the United States" within five years; Iraq within ten.

About this, however, we are so far doing, essentially, nothing. The "overriding goal of the Clinton administration," as Robert Kagan and Gary Schmitt have recently pointed out in these pages, "has been to preserve the ABM [Anti-Ballistic Missile] treaty, which essentially prohibits any national defense against missile attack and frustrates development of the most effective regional defenses for our troops and our allies."* This unwillingness to face the defensive imperatives of the missile age is mirrored by comprehensive American laxity in dealing with the nuclearization of the Middle East, on display most vividly in the Clinton team's extreme reluctance to reckon with Iran and Iraq.

It is true that as part of the deal struck in the recent negotiations at the Wye Plantation, the U.S. did give Israel a Memorandum of Agreement affirming American support in the event of a ballistic-missile threat. This document is quite similar in wording to a pledge given by Henry Kissinger in 1975 after an agreement securing the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Sinai and aimed at allaying Israeli concerns about a direct assault from the Soviet Union. Like that one, this one too promises cooperation in enhancing Israel's security, but what is notable here is the complete absence of specific assurances. All the Clinton administration offers its close ally is a privilege it already enjoys, namely, that in the event of a threat, the U.S. government "would consult promptly" with the government of Israel.

That is bad enough. But consider the difference between then and now. During the Yom Kippur war, the Soviet Union, then the Arab world's major patron, threatened to introduce its own forces into the Middle East; Washington responded in the most vigorous possible manner, placing U.S. forces on a global nuclear alert. Today's assurances by the Clinton administration must be measured against our resolute dawdling in response to challenges from all around the world involving weapons of mass destruction, as well as against our pitiful record of enforcing international agreements we have brokered.

And consider, too, the differing nature of the challenges themselves. The Soviet Union was an evil power, with a terrifyingly great arsenal at its disposal. But at least where nuclear weapons were concerned, and especially after the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, it knew the limits of the game. In many ways, the peril now facing both the United States and Israel, from players who have no use for rules *or* limits, is greater by several magnitudes.

For all these reasons, Israel's own nuclear arsenal has perhaps never been so crucial a part of its armament as it is right now. Moreover, given the threat to its very existence, and the world's general indifference to that threat, Israel's moral claim to a nuclear arsenal has also never been stronger. But, as an insurance policy against military disaster, its nuclear weapons are a wasting asset. Unless measures are taken to halt the Middle East's rogue states in their nuclear tracks, or to protect against their certain depredations, one dreads what the morrow will bring.

* "Now May We Please Defend Ourselves?," July 1998.

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Science, Fraud & the Baltimore Case

Jeremy Bernstein

EARLY IN 1985 I was invited to attend a symposium for journalists who write about science. Its purpose was to acquaint us with the then newly-identified virus that causes AIDS. Present were Robert Gallo from the National Cancer Institute and Luc Montaigner from the Pasteur Institute in Paris. Each of them had made independent identification of a virus that the French called LAV and the Americans called HTLV-III, and very soon their two laboratories had become engaged in a nasty patent dispute. In this connection, Gallo was also made the subject of an investigation for possible misconduct or even fraud by the National Institutes of Health, an investigation that had been demanded by Congressman John Dingell (D-MI). It took years before he was fully exonerated of, in effect, having stolen the work of the French scientists.

Also attending this symposium was David Baltimore. As far as I know, Baltimore was not then working actively on AIDS, but in 1970 he and another biologist, Howard Temin, had independently made an extremely significant discovery in cell biology for which the two men, along with Renato Dulbecco, would win the 1975 Nobel Prize for medicine. What they discovered was the existence of "retroviruses"—viruses in which the ordinary flow of genetic information from the double-stranded DNA to the single-stranded RNA is reversed. Indeed, the virus that causes AIDS is such a retrovirus.

Not being a biologist—not even having taken a course in biology—I had not gone to the symposium with the intention of writing anything, but simply out of an interest in a new and terrible disease. As the symposium proceeded, several questions occurred to me, but uncharacteristically I felt too shy to ask them. Afterward I decided to take a chance and write to Baltimore, who was then at MIT. Why, I wondered, had the AIDS virus *suddenly* erupted; had it been there all along, or were we now about to be flooded by a plague of brand-new viruses? And, I wondered, why a retrovirus? Why should this particular virus have chosen so eccentric a path?

Baltimore took the trouble to reply in a two-page letter that was so interesting I saved it. To my first question he responded:

> My understanding of biology would lead me to believe that the AIDS retrovirus has been in circulation somewhere for eons. In all probability there was a low level person-to-person transmission in Africa; there the virus might have caused a little bit of disease but, like most viruses, it was probably largely innocuous. In the very particular circumstances of adult transmission via bodily fluids, the virus has taken on a terrifying aspect that may never have been evident before.

My second question—why this particular virus?—marked me as a physicist. In the community of

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physicists, there is a feeling of insult if something seems to exist with no purpose. But biology is quite different. If I asked a biologist why there are giraffes, I suspect he would respond along the lines of what John von Neumann said to me when, as a student, I asked if the computer would ever replace the human mathematician: "Sonny, don't worry about it." Baltimore was much kinder:

> The particularities of a retrovirus make it a very good candidate for a cancer-inducing virus, but it does not seem especially well adapted to cause a disease like AIDS. Given a few paragraphs, I could justify why the virus might be able to have evolved this ability. But the short-form answer has to be that many viruses could have become the AIDS virus, in principle.

In other words, it just got there first.

What I did not know was at the very time Baltimore wrote this letter, he was participating in a laboratory experiment that would make him, too, the target of a congressional investigation and that would nearly destroy his career. Indeed, my next and only other contact with him was in the middle of that horrific episode. At the time—the fall of 1992—I was an adjunct professor at Rockefeller University. Baltimore had become president of Rockefeller two years earlier, but by the time of our meeting he had been forced to resign from that position and, although still staying on as a professor, was planning to return to MIT. He had asked me to drop by to discuss an article I had published about the efforts of the Nazis to make a nuclear weapon.

I recall having a very odd set of mixed feelings. I knew that Baltimore had made a lot of enemies among the senior faculty at Rockefeller, and also that he now stood accused of abetting a scientific fraud. The former was not very important to me. Academic politics is, I think, best characterized by the inverse of Lord Acton's maxim: absolute lack of power corrupts absolutely. But the fraud: was it true? It seemed unlikely, but how could one know?

Our conversation never touched on the subject. But now, to all intents and purposes, we have the answer to the question. Thanks to a new book by Daniel J. Kevles, *The Baltimore Case*,* the matter can be put to rest. There was no fraud.

IN DISCUSSING Kevles's book I should make it clear that I did not follow the science in detail. As I have already said, I am not a biologist, and a sentence like, "Thus the hypridomas in the vast majority of wells—119 plus 11, making a total of 130 in all—produced antibodies to NP with idiotypic birthmarks similar to the transgenes, but these antibodies had been generated by genes native to the normal Black/6 mice," of which there are hundreds, is more than I am prepared to try to parse. Nor, from what I read, can I say why the experiments being discussed were important, or what their consequences were. Yet I still have confidence in Kevles's conclusion. A well-known historian of science, he has interviewed everyone involved and has read all the transcripts of the hearings that took place over a period of some ten years as well as the vast peripheral literature that developed. Until anyone who still thinks Baltimore and his collaborators were guilty produces a book with comparable documentation, this one appears to me to be definitive.

What, then, was the Baltimore case?

After his work on the retrovirus, David Baltimore turned his attention to the general problem of how the immune system works. At this time, recombinant DNA—snippets of DNA that could be spliced into the natural DNA of a host—was being used for the first time in experimental cell biology. Baltimore learned that a Brazilian-born scientist named Thereza Imanishi-Kari, then working as a postdoctoral researcher in a laboratory in Germany, had discovered a way of tracking certain immune genes in mice.

In 1982, Baltimore had the idea of using Imanishi-Kari's methods to see how specific antibodies operated when genetically engineered cells were introduced. Two of his own postdoctoral fellows—David Weaver and Rudolf Grosschedl—were working with him on this problem, but none of the three had the necessary experience in serology (the study of blood) to ascertain exactly which antibodies were circulating in the mice. So he invited Imanishi-Kari, by now an assistant professor at MIT, to join the group—or rather he persuaded her, since she was at a stage of her career where she wanted independent recognition.

Grosschedl soon left for another job, leaving Weaver as intermediary between Baltimore's laboratory and Imanishi-Kari's. Although the three scientists met regularly, it is unclear what hands-on work Baltimore did himself; this, indeed, may have been the source of problems later on. Then, too, although Imanishi-Kari spoke some seven languages, including Japanese, her English was apparently very difficult to follow—another problem in the collaboration and, once the investigations began, a disaster.

The results of the experiments, which required in-

* Norton, 448 pp., $29.95.

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credible care to conduct, were very surprising: the mice did not produce antibodies as anticipated. Why this should have been so, and why it matters to our understanding of the immune system, is a subject on which Kevles is not very helpful. But the work certainly merited publication, and it was duly written up and published in the April 25, 1986 issue of the journal *Cell*, with Baltimore's name listed last among the authors. Usually this implies a certain detachment.

Enter Margot O'Toole, then a promising young biologist who in the spring of 1985 had met Imanishi-Kari at a party. Unfortunately, in addition to her talents, O'Toole had a history of time-consuming political activism and an apparent inability to follow a scientific project through to the end. Nonetheless, Imanishi-Kari, using grant money from the National Institutes of Health, hired her for one year as a post-doc on the understanding that at the end of that term she would have to generate her own support.

The two women clashed almost immediately, and things only went from bad to worse. A breaking point came when O'Toole tried to confirm Imanishi-Kari's experiments in order to extend them; she was unable to get the experiments to work, and from this she drew the conclusion that Imanishi-Kari's data must be wrong. Then, in May 1986, she came across seventeen pages of data in the notebook of one of Imanishi-Kari's co-workers; to her, at least, the data appeared to contradict what had been published in *Cell*. Without asking permission, O'Toole xeroxed these pages and kept them. Her reason for this treacherous act was that she was now fully engaged in a higher task: exposing the supposedly flawed science in the *Cell* paper. Since this work had been supported in part by a federal agency, any or all of it was, she reasoned, public (i.e., her) property.

Imanishi-Kari was planning to move to Tufts, and so O'Toole decided to take her grievances to Henry Wortis, an associate professor at the Tufts Medical School who happened to have been her thesis supervisor. This resulted in a meeting on May 23 at MIT with both O'Toole and Imanishi-Kari present. Everyone agreed there were some errors in the *Cell* paper, and everyone thought they were minor—everyone, that is, but O'Toole, who insisted that the paper be retracted.

Next, O'Toole took her case to the dean of science at MIT, a biochemist named Gene Brown, who asked if she was charging fraud. When O'Toole replied no, only that a mistake had been made in Imanishi-Kari's interpretation of the data, Brown suggested bringing in Herman Eisen, a senior MIT immunologist, to help sort out the issues. O'Toole drove to Cape Cod to meet Eisen, who found it difficult to understand exactly what her problem was. She wrote a memorandum laying out her complaints, again omitting any mention of fraud.

At this point Baltimore was brought in. He acknowledged that one of the tables in the paper was mislabeled—he had misunderstood something Imanishi-Kari had told him over the phone—but as this, too, was minor he did not think *Cell* would even bother to publish an erratum. It seemed clear that the only way the matter could be settled to everyone's satisfaction was if an independent experiment were conducted—but once again O'Toole demurred. And she demurred yet once more when Baltimore suggested that she write a letter to *Cell*, outlining her own interpretation of the data. That, she felt, would be pointless: Baltimore could write an opposing letter, and he would be believed because of his reputation. As far as I can tell from Kevles's account, at no time during any of these proceedings did Baltimore or anybody else utter a derogatory word about O'Toole's scientific ability.

UP TO now, the dispute had remained within the local academic community; but it was about to escalate. O'Toole contacted an ex-graduate student of Imanishi-Kari named Charles Maplethorpe. Teacher and student had gotten on so badly that Imanishi-Kari ultimately refused to write letters of recommendation for Maplethorpe, thus making it very difficult for him to find a job. O'Toole turned over to Maplethorpe the seventeen pages of data she had purloined from Imanishi-Kari's laboratory, and he then contacted Ned Feder and Walter W. Stewart of the National Institutes of Health.

These two men had just embarked on what would become their primary mission at NIH: the investigation of scientific fraud. After studying the seventeen pages, they decided that the data were indeed fudged and that Baltimore had been a party to the deed. Stewart and Feder now wrote to all the authors of the *Cell* paper threatening an internal audit of the data. Outraged, Baltimore entered into at least one very angry exchange with Stewart in which he threatened to sue. Then, late in the winter of 1988, Stewart and Feder opened discussions with two men who functioned as investigators for John Dingell, then the chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, with jurisdiction over the NIH.

Dingell was on a crusade against scientific fraud, and here apparently was a case involving a Nobel Prize winner! What could be better? Traveling to Boston to interview O'Toole, Dingell's two investigators found her and her family living with her

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mother; O'Toole herself was working for her brother at the Gentle Giant Moving Company—a consequence, she claimed, of her "whistle-blowing." By now the press had picked up the story and was clearly on O'Toole's side.

The NIH was now obliged to launch a formal investigation. One result was that the authors of the *Cell* paper wrote a letter to the journal outlining the various mistakes in the printed version but stating their strong belief that none of them invalidated its central results. In its own report, the NIH failed to stipulate fraud but proposed that the authors write an additional statement attesting to the paper's problems. Once again, this did not satisfy O'Toole—and to make matters worse, the NIH report, which was supposed to be confidential, was leaked to the press.

In the meantime, Dingell's committee had subpoenaed all documents in Imanishi-Kari's possession that were related to the *Cell* paper. Some of them were even turned over to the Secret Service to check for the possible doctoring of dates—evidence of which the Secret Service duly announced it had uncovered. This information led to an open hearing in May 1989 at which the authors of the *Cell* paper were the star witnesses.

Although Baltimore had been warned not to attempt to "one-up" a member of Congress, he was unable to contain his distaste for the committee and in particular for Dingell, who was described when it was over as "very red in the face . . . clearly angry." By contrast, O'Toole, who testified at the following session, got a cordial reception. After all, her charges were now firmly established in the public domain and widely reported in the press, as were the sufferings she was enduring as a truth-teller.

In January 1990, Imanishi-Kari was put on the NIH's "Alert" list of people suspected of fraud or found guilty of misconduct; in April, one of her grants was canceled. The following year she was notified by the NIH that, according to its latest review, she was guilty as charged. This would have meant the end of her career, but there was still an appeals process and she began to explore it.

At this point one of the very few heroes of the story emerged: Bernadine Healy, director of the NIH from 1991 to 1993. Basically, Imanishi-Kari had been deprived of her legal rights to due process. Since she was not allowed access to her own lab reports once they were confiscated, she could not prepare a defense against the charge that dates had been altered. Bernadine Healy put a stop to this. Once given access to her material, Imanishi-Kari and her lawyers and their experts were eventually able to punch very large holes in the reports submitted by the Secret Service laboratory.

Healy also began a reorganization of the NIH office charged with the investigations, and another review was initiated. In October 1994, the NIH produced its final report, again stating that Imanishi-Kari was guilty as charged. One more appeal was possible. It took two years and hundreds of hours, but finally, on June 21, 1996, the appeals board issued a ringing verdict of innocence for Imanishi-Kari and a resounding condemnation of the previous findings of the NIH. A ten-year ordeal was over.

As a practical matter, Imanishi-Kari was now awarded tenure at Tufts, where her position had been held in abeyance until she could clear herself, and her NIH grant was restored. As for Baltimore, who had never abandoned her even at terrible cost to himself, he became the president of the California Institute of Technology in 1997. In that limited sense, this dreadful story has a happy ending.

But there are some less happy lessons to be drawn from it. Science, when it is healthy, proceeds by constantly correcting and renewing itself. There is a marketplace of ideas, and if it is left alone, only the good ones survive—maybe not instantaneously, but certainly over the long and usually over the medium term. Moreover, outright forgery in science is quite rare.

Let me give an example of how the system works. On March 29, 1989, Stanley Pons and Martin Fleischmann, two electrochemists from the University of Utah, held a press conference to announce that they had succeeded in producing nuclear fusion in a simple chemical set-up that operated at something like room temperature: cold fusion, as it came to be called. This was an absolutely sensational discovery. Nuclear processes are about a million times more energetic than chemical ones. If what Pons and Fleischmann were claiming really worked, you would be able to produce electricity that was literally too cheap to meter.

But the very simplicity of Pons and Fleischmann's set-up made it relatively easy to try to duplicate. You did not need machines costing hundreds of millions of dollars and attempting to reproduce the conditions in the center of the sun (where fusion is the energy source). You could do it, in a manner of speaking, on a tabletop. By the end of April 1990, several groups announced that they had been unable to reproduce Pons and Fleischmann's data, even when using instrumentation more sensitive than theirs. Indeed, those data did not themselves appear to be internally consistent. As far as most observers were concerned, the idea was dead.

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I do not know if Pons and Fleischmann had any conscious intention to deceive—which would have been fraud—or, as seems overwhelmingly likely, they simply made a mistake from which they would not back down. Certainly their behavior was strange: Pons's lawyer went so far as to threaten to sue to prevent publication in the journal *Nature* of the results of an experiment claiming to refute theirs. But their behavior is not the point. There may still be some true believers in cold fusion, and hundreds of millions of dollars have been spent trying to revive the idea, but it took only about a month to cast sufficient doubt on the original experiment so that there was basically no further interest in the subject.

That is why I think forgery in science is so rare (as opposed to honest mistakes, which are its heart's blood). If one's motivation is to make oneself celebrated—to become rich and famous—one has to produce experimental results that will be noticed. But these are just the results that can be most readily checked by others. Such a forger sows the seeds of his own rapid exposure.

As for forgery at a lower level, why bother? As far as one's reputation and one's career are concerned, it just does not pay. What had Imanishi-Kari and/or Baltimore to gain by promulgating false data? Since the results of the experiment seemed anomalous, it was bound to be repeated. The NIH, moreover, was the funding agency for much of the biological research done at MIT, including Imanishi-Kari's. If fraud were established, such funding would almost certainly be withdrawn, with devastating consequences for all concerned.

So what went wrong in the Baltimore case? One thing that puzzled me in Kevles's account is why the dispute was allowed to rise so high up the MIT administrative hierarchy. Surely the dean of science does not step in every time two groups of MIT researchers have a scientific disagreement. Why did he bother to get mixed up in this one? I can only speculate, but it seems highly plausible that beneath the excessive regard paid by all sorts of busy people to a minor spat over an inconsequential experiment lay that contemporary nemesis of academic life, political correctness.

IT WOULD be nice to think that the hard sciences are immune to the influence of this doctrine, and that judgments on scientific questions are always driven by considerations of merit alone and never by any concerns based on "feelings," much less on mere personal attributes like race or, in this case, sex. It would be nice to think that—but naive. The fact is that Margot O'Toole was able to get away with repeatedly rejecting a perfectly sensible and scientifically unimpeachable suggestion: that the experiment in dispute be conducted again by an independent researcher. Instead of being told that, in that case, the matter was finished and done, her complaints were accommodated—fatally.

Nor is the scientific community devoid of its fair quotient of fools and knaves, examples of whom, I am sorry to report, turned up in representative numbers in the Baltimore case. Here I do not have in mind the central characters so much as a few of Baltimore's colleagues—including some very distinguished ones—who went after him with hammer and tongs when he was down. Some apparently felt that, in his confrontation with Dingell, Baltimore had jeopardized the government support of research—their research. For others, the matter seemed personal: Baltimore, who in the view of some had gotten too far too fast, was finally getting his. (It seems that Baltimore did have a reputation for arrogance, though as I have indicated, that was hardly the impression he made on me.)

Among those who took off after Baltimore in this way was James Watson, the man who with Francis Crick had first illuminated the character of DNA in one of the greatest scientific discoveries of this century. Ever since I read Watson's 1969 book *The Double Helix*, I have thought him a scientific genius and a silly person. Watson decided that Baltimore not only was guilty of abetting fraud but had stolen his work on retroviruses from Howard Temin, and that therefore his Nobel Prize should be annulled. (Temin repudiated this idea in no uncertain terms.)

Joining the fray with Watson were the distinguished Harvard biologists Walter Gilbert—also a Nobel-Prize winner—and Mark Ptashne, both of whom had been friends of Baltimore and his wife. After the vindication, Ptashne had conciliatory things to say, but Gilbert apparently still believes Imanishi-Kari committed fraud and that Baltimore was wrong to challenge Dingell the way he did.

What I am saying is that, in science no less than in other professional endeavors, human error and human subjectivity abound. Unlike in many other professional endeavors, they are compensated for by the community's intense scrutiny of itself: the most searching reviews of one's work are the reviews one will receive from one's peers. This is, indeed, the great glory of science. What the Baltimore case shows is just how precious a glory it is, and also how fragile—which makes it all the more crucial that it be guarded with zeal from the forces that in so many other callings have undone so many.

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Dubinsky on the Loose

A Story

Joseph Epstein

Manny Dubinsky had been 50 years in the scrap-metal business, a buyer, before he retired at the age of seventy-five. Why scrap? Because when he got out of the Army, the better part of which he spent as an orderly-room sergeant in Guam, he had been offered a job at H.J. Kramer Metals, Inc., owned by his mother's brother Henry. Going to law school would have meant another three years before he could marry Grace, and after the four years they had already waited for the war to end, that was precisely three years too long. Dubinsky went into scrap metal because he wanted to marry without further delay, and so well had the marriage turned out that he never, not for a minute, seriously regretted it.

When his Uncle Henry's two sons and their brother-in-law Herb Harris took over the major positions in the business, friends said to him, "Manny, why don't you go in for yourself?" "I'd be glad to," was his answer, "as soon as you can arrange the $3 million for my first crushing machine." It was big business, scrap metal, not for little guys; and, though Manny Dubinsky always made a good living—and some years a damn good living—when it came to million-dollar machinery he had to count himself a little guy.

Everybody loved Grace. And why not? She was an extraordinary woman. Dubinsky never tired of telling people that his wife had majored in physics at the University of Illinois—and this was in 1937, when she was the only female in the department. She was, also in his phrase, the "playmaker" of their social life. Somehow or other, at home or on one of their vacation cruises, she found couples who were perfectly simpatico. Until Ruthie went off to college—she was their only child after a tricky first, and last, pregnancy—Grace remained at home, devoting herself to her family. When she returned to work she became a science editor at a Chicago textbook firm, turning the opaque writing of physicists and chemists into readable English. But even with her full-time job Dubinsky never felt any lessening of her wifely ministrations. He couldn't remember a bad meal; where clean shirts came from was knowledge kept from him; and never once did he pack his own suitcase for his many buying trips.

There was no one, it seemed, that Grace couldn't get along with, including the Bermans. Art Berman, an insurance man, was Ruthie's father-in-law, and as confidently boring a man as Dubinsky had ever met. Estelle was a female bully, only happy when she got her way no matter how trivial the point in contention, and with Estelle everything was in contention. As for their son Larry, a person-

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al-injury lawyer who managed to strike a note of insufferable knowingness in everything he said, Dubinsky tried not to be around him any more than was absolutely necessary.

Shortly before the wedding, the Dubinskys had gone out with their friends Harry and Anne Ellmann, and Anne asked him how he felt about his much-loved daughter's match. "I'll tell you how I feel," Dubinsky heard himself reply, "I feel like I'm about to hand over a Stradivarius to a gorilla." Grace kicked him gently under the table. "We have to live with these terrible people, Manny," she said in the car on the way home. "It won't do to knock them, even to our dearest friends." That was Grace.

Dubinsky's 75th birthday nearly coincided with his 50th anniversary at Kramer Metals. Herb Harris, now president of the firm, had let him work past normal retirement age, and, although he was still carrying his share of the load, even Dubinsky knew the time had come to hang it up. A lunch was given in his honor at the Standard Club. The place had once been strictly for German Jews, and his Uncle Henry, like every other successful East European Jew, had had to settle for the old Covenant Club on Clark and Madison. But through what Grace once called "mixed marriages" with their co-religionists from Eastern Europe, the ranks of German Jews in Chicago had so thinned out that the Standard now took in anyone able to ante up the hefty entry fee.

At the lunch, with all the officers and buyers present, Herb Harris spoke of Manny Dubinsky's long service. Everywhere, he said, the mutual pact of loyalty between business institutions and the people who worked for them was breaking down; but not yet at Kramer Metals. Thanking Dubinsky for his efforts on the firm's behalf, he presented him with a Rolex watch and a check for $20,000, which, he said, he hoped Manny would use to take his wife on a first-class vacation to Europe.

Dubinsky was much moved. Driving home to Evanston, he felt his years had not been wasted. He remembered Herbie Harris as a kid, coming into the firm in the early 1960's. He'd led it through some pretty rocky patches, and turned out to be not only a clear-headed businessman but a *mentsh*. Dubinsky glanced at the large new watch on his wrist, felt the check resting in his suit-coat pocket. Grace, he thought, would be pleased. Maybe they would take that trip.

Parking the Buick in the garage of his apartment building, Dubinsky let himself in the door and called his wife's name. No answer. He called again. She must be out. He went into the kitchen to get a glass of ice water and found the refrigerator door open, Grace, face down, on the floor. He knelt to feel her forehead. Cold. He called 911, and while waiting for the ambulance, gave his wife his best shot at artificial respiration. Sitting on the floor, he rocked her in his arms, chanting "No, God, no, please God, no." He had no recollection of it, but later he was told that the paramedics had to pry him loose from her. The cause of death was massive cerebral hemorrhage; the time was fixed at an hour before Dubinsky arrived home. On one and the same day he lost his work and his truest friend.

NOW, THREE years later, Dubinsky had yet to recover from the combined blow.

Much sooner than that, he realized he was helpless when it came to operating the washers and dryers in the basement. Although he thought he knew how to cook an egg, one day he put in six to boil and went out briefly on an errand. He returned home to a terrible smell, egg on the kitchen ceiling and wall behind the stove, and a burned-out pot. Apart from breakfast, he tried eating all his meals out, but discovered he was unbearably self-conscious sitting alone in a restaurant. He began bringing dinners back from the Pine Yard, the nearby Chinese restaurant.

At Grace's funeral service—it was at Piser's in Skokie—there had been a huge turnout, but going over the names of people who had signed the book, Dubinsky saw that the vast majority were his wife's friends, not his. After her death he was occasionally invited to dinner by the Ellmanns or other couples he and Grace used to see together. But before long the invitations, not all that many to begin with, had dropped off. Grace, not Manny, had been the real draw of the Dubinskys.

A month or so after the funeral, Dubinsky began to notice something else: he was developing a tendency, quite new to him, to tell people off. One day in the Golden Parthenon, a local greasy spoon—a Grecian spoon, Grace had called it—the waitress brought his check along with lunch and he barked out in a voice he didn't quite recognize, "What the hell's the rush act here? You can't give me the check after my coffee? Maybe you'd prefer I eat in the goddamn car?" In the express line of the supermarket, to the young check-out girl with a diamond chip in her nose and an earring on her lip he snarled, "What's all this extra jewelry about? You want to make sure you don't get ahead in life?" In line at the bank, he advised the man ahead of him, who looked to be his own age and who had white hair pulled back in a small

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ponytail, "Excuse me, pal, are you aware that your hairdo makes you look like a complete schmuck?" As if avoiding a lunatic, the man turned away.

The worst came one evening at his daughter's in Highland Park. Since Grace's death, Dubinsky had a standing invitation to Friday-night dinner, which gave him a chance to see his grandchildren Tyler and Justin, both now in high school. An only child himself, Dubinsky hadn't any other family. His sister-in-law Sylvia had died a year before Grace, and Grace's brother Bernie was in a nursing home with Alzheimer's in Boca Raton. Ruthie and the children were all he had.

Dinner that Friday went reasonably well. Ruthie cooked a brisket, her mother's recipe, and they were eating their dessert, flourless chocolate cake with raspberries. The boys had already gone off. Dubinsky's mistake was to ask his son-in-law how he liked the Bulls' chances in the Eastern-division finals against the Knicks. The series was in its fifth game.

"Bulls in seven," Larry said. "You have to know that, Manny. Too much money is at stake—ticket sales, television revenues, concessions—not to make sure it goes the full seven games."

"I would have thought," Dubinsky answered, "that too much was at stake even to consider fixing a pro basketball game."

"Manny, c'mon, you've been around. With the right people at the controls, there isn't anything can't be fixed. You know it and I know it."

"I don't know anything of the kind," Dubinsky said.

"Well," his son-in-law put in, "maybe you should."

"You telling me I'm naive?" Dubinsky asked. "Is that what you're telling me? Where the hell do you get off saying something like that?" He saw his daughter wince, but it was too late; he couldn't stop; the train had already jumped the track. "You know-it-all son of a bitch. No one can tell you anything. You've got all the answers. I'll tell you something, son-in-law, you're just another low-grade con-man lawyer, of which this country could use about half a million fewer than it has. . . ." He looked again at his daughter, who didn't know where to put her eyes.

There went Friday nights.

Dubinsky asked his friend Murray Kaplan if he remembered his having had such a violent temper in the past. Murray said no.

"Then what's going on?"

"Forgive me if I'm wrong, Manny," Murray offered, "but I wonder if maybe you're not really angry at having lost Gracie the way you did. Maybe you're taking it out on everyone else. I mean, it's just possible."

Dubinsky had to admit the possibility. He would have to control himself—and he also would have to control still another habit he had developed, that of delivering little lectures on the superiority of the past to the present. Suddenly, as if out of nowhere, he found himself exclaiming to people he hardly knew that when he was in his twenties he hadn't known of a single divorced couple—outside Hollywood, of course. Or he would launch into a sermonette on how young couples seemed to want everything these days, whereas when he was first married it was assumed that life's luxuries were well in the future. Or he would attack today's athletes, with their insanely large salaries, as unappreciative pigs. Or regale his dentist's technician with an account of the Depression, when just to have a job was to consider oneself blessed, whereas today . . .

This, too, had to stop.

A YEAR or so after Grace's death, friends, mostly other women, had begun to try fixing Dubinsky up. So strong was his loneliness that he went along with it, at least at first. Murray Kaplan's wife Lillian knew widows she wanted him to meet. At Beth Emet, the synagogue where Grace had been more active than he, though he still went on occasion, other opportunities presented themselves.

Dubinsky wasn't looking for a tootsie. He was now seventy-eight, and most of the women he considered eligible were in their middle-to-late sixties or early-to-middle seventies. Yet everyone seemed wrong. Many had serious health problems; others had been married to wealthy men and were looking for someone to maintain them at the same level of luxury.

But to Dubinsky the most astonishing thing of all was the high number of women he met who, as grandmothers, brought with them wildly dysfunctional families. At least he considered them dysfunctional, which he understood was the new word for screwed-up, wildly out of control, deeply *meshugeh*. One night at dinner, a woman named Ida Baumgartner broke down in tears. She had learned just before meeting him that her favorite granddaughter Brittany had been deserted by her lesbian companion of three years and was going through hell. Another, Louise Spivak, casually mentioned that her physician son-in-law had turned himself in to the Illinois medical board for cocaine addiction. Gladys Schwartz's grandson had AIDS. Faye Bernstein's son Marvin was leaving his wife, which didn't seem too terrible until she added that he was planning a sex-change operation. My God, thought Dubinsky, while I was living quietly with my wife and shopping around for metals, the world was going mad.

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He pulled back. Enough with these women and their crazy families; better to live alone, quietly, sanely. Still, the loneliness got to him. For about eleven seconds he considered a retirement home, where something like a social life would be provided. But, although he suffered some of the memory lapses of age, his health—touch wood—was still excellent, his mind clear; he could make it fine on his own, with luck maybe for a good while longer.

Time lay heavily. On a typical day, Dubinsky awoke at six—go break the habits of a lifetime—had coffee, juice, and cereal, read through the *Chicago Tribune*, and was showered by 7:30. He had joined the Evanston Athletic Club, and five days a week he went for a one-hour workout: a bit of walking around the track, time on the stationary bicycle, the rowing machine, the treadmill, some light weight-lifting. He was usually finished by nine o'clock. The rest of the day hung there, like a punishing desert sun, bearing down on him.

Some mornings he would do a bit of food shopping, having learned by now how to put a Stouffers dinner in the microwave and warm up Progresso soups on the stove, though his doctor told him to watch the sodium. He could also boil hot dogs. Then there was the occasional medical or dental appointment, and every other Thursday, Krystyna, the Polish woman who cleaned the apartment, appeared at 9:30. His accountant he saw exactly once a year, at tax time. He wasn't much on movies. Though he watched television, mostly the news on CNN or PBS and some sports, the so-called prime-time stuff left him pretty cold. He met his daughter Ruthie for lunch, though less often than after he told off her husband. He was saddened to discover they hadn't all that much to say to each other.

DUBINSKY HAD always been a reader. Thank God for that. He began using the Evanston library, where he took out two or three books a week, mostly on current history and especially on the war, his war, World War II. He was also a sucker for books on Winston Churchill, the greatest man, he thought, of the 20th century. The library, recently rebuilt, was a large, comfortable place, clean and well-lit, and Dubinsky spent much time on the third floor, in the periodicals section. He began reading the *Wall Street Journal*, *Fortune*, *Business Week*, *Forbes*, the *Economist*. He wasn't a stock-market man, nor did he know all that much about the intricacies of economics, but he did like to think himself a businessman, even in retirement. Besides, he preferred the library to the isolation of his apartment with its sometimes overwhelming weight of memories.

In the periodicals section the main librarian was a small woman, pudgy, with long hair beginning to turn gray, given to extremes of moodiness. Sometimes she made Dubinsky feel he was part of the family, at other times that he was an old bum using the library for shelter. Another woman, a light-skinned black, maybe a mulatto, also worked in the section part-time. *Her* cheerfulness was perpetual, her smile winning. She was tallish, slender, and wore soft dresses and gauzy scarves of vibrant colors. She knew his name from the small forms he filled out when he needed to see a back issue of one of his business magazines. "How are you, Mr. Dubinsky?" she would say, or, "Nice day, isn't it, Mr. Dubinsky?" He didn't know her name.

On the day that would have been his 53rd wedding anniversary, Dubinsky got up with an odd pain in his left knee. Murray, two years older, had once warned him about these signs of age. "The morning you wake up free of pain," he had said, "watch out. You're probably dead." Dubinsky limped into the kitchen, poured juice and cereal, put up the water for instant coffee. He decided to take a pass on the health club. Skimming through the *Trib*, he wondered what the day would have been like if Grace were still alive. Would they have had a party with their friends to celebrate? Would they have gone off on a trip together, maybe to New York to see some shows? God, he missed her.

He went into the den to pay some bills, taking out his checkbook, his Cross pen, the packet of stamps. He was signing a check to the gas company when his eyes fogged. Jesus, Dubinsky thought, I'm crying. On the couch now, facing the television set, he felt the tears come faster. "Grace," he said to the empty room, "I should have gone first. It would have made more sense."

It was a new low, and it wasn't his style. Quickly, leaving the bills on the desk, Dubinsky showered and dressed and left for the library. He made his way through the *Wall Street Journal*, then forced himself to read through a good part of the current *Fortune*. This being his wedding anniversary, he decided to treat himself to lunch at an Italian restaurant across the street, where a young waiter announced that his name was Howard and proceeded to recite the chef's specials for the day at a level of detail Dubinsky had no hope of following. He ordered a grilled chicken sandwich and an iced tea. The noise level in the place seemed very high, and Howard must have returned four times to ask if everything was all right. Scanning the room, Dubinsky decided he was the oldest person there by twenty years.

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After buying a few toiletries at the drugstore and browsing at Barnes & Noble, Dubinsky returned to the library at two. He took from the shelf *Churchill's Generals* by John Keegan, and began to read in one of the comfortable leather chairs until he felt a jerk of his neck and realized that he had fallen asleep. For more than two hours, it turned out. Old-man stuff, he thought, this nodding-off in public places. Had his mouth been open, had he been snoring? No one was in sight except for two black high-school girls working on their homework at a nearby table.

Dubinsky gathered up the Churchill book along with his small plastic bag of toiletries and walked, slowly, down the long, rather steep staircase to the first floor. At one of the automatic check-out machines, he removed his library card from his wallet and put the book through. As he was picking it up, the pleasant woman from the periodicals section walked past.

"Hello, Mr. Dubinsky," she said, flashing her smile.

"Nice to see you," said Dubinsky, still a bit dazed from his nap. He stared at her as she walked off, then took his book and left.

THE PHONE rang at a little after seven as Dubinsky was finishing his microwaved frozen Salisbury steak with potatoes and a dish of vanilla ice cream washed down by decaffeinated coffee.

"Hello, this is Olivia Hampton." The voice was familiar, but not the name.

"I'm sorry, who?"

"At the library."

Of course. "Sorry," said Dubinsky. "What can I do for you?"

"Well, it seems you left your wallet in the library, and I have it with me now. I would have called earlier, but I've been on the run."

Dubinsky's hand went to his back pocket. Empty. Gone.

"My God," he said, "I hadn't even noticed it was missing. Where'd you find it?"

"It was on the table at the check-out machines. Someone turned it in. When would you like to pick it up?"

"I guess I could get it at the library tomorrow," he said.

"I'm not planning to go in to work tomorrow," she said. "Maybe you could pick it up here. I'm on Madison, in southeast Evanston. Or I could drop it off for you if you like."

Dubinsky thought for a moment. He didn't like to drive at night if he could avoid it, but he also didn't want to ask this woman to come out.

"Are you by any chance free to meet me for lunch tomorrow?" he asked.

"I guess I could be," she said.

The Italian restaurant came vaguely to mind. "How about the Roxy, at noon?"

"I'll see you there," she said, and hung up.

Standing in the foyer—he arrived ten minutes early—Dubinsky wondered if he'd made a mistake. Until last night he hadn't known this woman's name. What the hell would they talk about? How would he get through this lunch?

"Miss Hampton," he said, as she entered through the revolving door. She was wearing a cream-colored dress and a bright red scarf with lots of blue and yellow in it. Her shoes were red.

She held out her hand. "Nice to see you, Mr. Dubinsky," she said. "By the way, it's Mrs. Hampton."

"You're married?"

"Was. I'm a widow. My husband died nine years ago."

A woman in her early twenties, in black pants and top, hair pulled back from her face, showed them to a table against the wall. The restaurant didn't seem quite so daunting as before.

"Do you come here often?" she asked. What wonderful teeth, Dubinsky thought, strong and white. He himself wore a partial bridge. She must have been in her early sixties, maybe a touch older.

"Not too often," he replied.

"Hi," a young girl announced. "I'm Kelley, and I'll be your server today. May I tell you about our specials?"

They exchanged glances.

"Sure," said Dubinsky, "let 'er rip," and she went through her *spiel*: "just a touch of tarragon," "a light coating of pesto," "a slight hint of balsamic vinegar." Again they looked at each other, smiling.

"Look here, honey," Mrs. Hampton said, "I think you can stop all that talk now. I'm going to have the grilled chicken sandwich and some iced tea."

"Same for me," Dubinsky said, ordering yesterday's lunch.

"Strange world we're living in," she said. "Perhaps you've noticed."

"Afraid I have. It's become one of my subjects—one I've had to steer myself away from. I get a little crazy on it."

"Me, too," she said. "I find I have to bite my tongue all the time. Especially at the library. The other night I went to a movie, and when I came out I said to myself, 'I don't ever want to see another movie I haven't already seen before—maybe 30 years before.' Oh, before I forget," she reached into her purse, "your wallet."

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A delicate moment, Dubinsky thought. He considered offering a reward but then, afraid of insulting her, thought better of it.

"There's sixty-eight dollars in it," she said. "Nothing important's missing, I hope."

Dubinsky checked for his credit cards, his driver's license; everything seemed to be there. "This is a first for me, leaving my wallet," he said. "I'm glad to have it back. Thanks."

"I've left my purse in different places more than once. It's part of getting older, I suppose."

"You haven't hit that age yet," he said.

"I'm seventy-two."

"Really," Dubinsky said. "I hope you don't think I'm conning you, but you seem a lot younger."

"I do think you're conning me, but feel free to do more of it." She flashed her smile again. "Tell me, Mr. Dubinsky, how long have you been a widower?"

"Three years, but I don't remember saying I was a widower."

"You didn't have to," she said. "It shows."

"How so?"

"The way you carry yourself. The sadness around the eyes, the bereft look."

"It's that obvious."

"To me it is. But then I still see it in myself, and it's nearly ten years since my husband died. I think the only serious penalty you pay for a good marriage is that you never really get over its coming to an end. I still get up some mornings disappointed that Charley isn't next to me."

"Then it doesn't get any easier?"

"You lose something that can't be replaced. At the same time, you know, life goes on. It has to go on."

Dubinsky wondered what Grace would have thought of this woman. He wondered, in fact, what she would have thought of his being at lunch with a black woman who sounded, if truth be told, as if she were Jewish.

"My wife also happened to have been my best friend, so it was like losing two key people at once, if you know what I mean, Mrs. Hampton."

"Forgive me, but if we're going to talk about such things, maybe you'd better call me Olivia."

"I'm Immanuel—Manny, if you like."

Through the rest of lunch he filled her in on his family, and learned from her that she had a son who was a dentist living in South Shore and a daughter in Washington, D.C., with three kids and a husband who sold municipal bonds. Her own husband, like her son, had been a dentist. She herself had gone to the University of Chicago but didn't finish her degree, which she much regretted. She had begun working at the library a year after her husband died. Nothing dysfunctional here.

She was very funny about her co-workers. She told him about a librarian on the second floor, a woman in her fifties, who hated to put new books into circulation, claiming that the patrons would only wreck them eventually. "I mean," she said, "she actually used the word 'eventually.'" The mood swings of the woman in periodicals she attributed to her relationship with a man she had been dating for some 23 years who was himself under the thumb of a psychotherapist and who didn't feel he should marry or do anything to alter his life until he completed therapy. "And that," she said, "figures to be around the time vaudeville comes back. Poor Kathy, I'm afraid she's just not a good closer."

Dubinsky was having a good time. They rehearsed their common view that the world was growing nuttier and nuttier, dumber and dumber. Dubinsky confided his opinions on men's ponytails, purple and other colored hair, earrings inserted in places other than the ear. He mentioned what seemed to him the madness in the families of the few women he had gone out with after his wife died. He discovered he was able to make her laugh.

"My motto," she said, "has become, take the world as you find it, but in your own fashion try not to leave it that way. Does that make any sense?"

Dubinsky didn't want to answer too quickly. "It does," he said after a pause, "it really does."

THE RESTAURANT was beginning to empty. He looked at his watch: they had been together for more than two and a half hours.

"I suppose we ought to let this young woman go home," she said.

"I suppose so." Dubinsky left the money for lunch and a 30-percent tip. When they emerged the sun was strong and he experienced that sweet sensation of return that he used to feel 70-odd years ago coming out of the Granada movie theater into the sunlight. Then, as now, he had to adjust, and then as now the adjustment was to a slightly richer reality.

"Olivia," he said, shaking her hand, "I would like it if we could do this again."

"I would, too, Immanuel," she said. "Call when you feel like. My number's in the book."

"I will," he said, "maybe fairly soon."

"That would be fine. And thanks for lunch."

"Thanks for the wallet."

Driving home in a haze of elation, Dubinsky looked down at the speedometer and noted that he was doing 45 in a 30-mile-an-hour zone. He braked gently and wondered how many days he was required to wait before calling her for dinner.

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OBSERVATIONS

Salman Rushdie's Delusions, and Ours

Daniel Pipes

ON SEPTEMBER 24, just two days shy of a decade since the publication of *The Satanic Verses* by the British novelist Salman Rushdie, the foreign minister of the Islamic Republic of Iran met with his British counterpart and declared that the Iranian government

> has no intention, nor is it going to take any action whatsoever, to threaten the life of the author of *The Satanic Verses* or anybody associated with his work, nor will it encourage or assist anybody to do so. Accordingly, the government dissociates itself from any reward that has been offered in this regard and does not support it.

Pronouncing this statement a momentous change in Iranian policy, Foreign Secretary Robin Cook responded: "These assurances should make possible a much more constructive relationship between the United Kingdom—and I believe the European Union—[and] Iran, and the opening of a new chapter in our relations." He went on to announce the UK's resumption of full diplomatic relations with Teheran, broken since 1989.

The British foreign minister was hardly the only one to construe the Iranian statement as a decisive retreat from the February 1989 edict, signed by Ayatollah Khomeini, that condemned to death "the author of the book entitled *The Satanic Verses* . . . and all those involved in its publication who were aware of its content." Amid the general jubilation, Rushdie himself, who has spent the last ten years in semi-seclusion, was particularly euphoric. "It's a breakthrough and it's over. . . . There is no longer any threat from the Iranian regime. The *fatwa* will be left to wither on the vine." Best of all, Rushdie added, "It seems this has been done in Iran with consensus. There doesn't seem to be any opposition to it."

Is this true?

THE STATEMENT by the Iranian foreign minister, Kamal Kharrazi, had three carefully crafted components. First, Teheran would not attempt to kill Rushdie or others connected with *The Satanic Verses*. Second, Iran would not encourage others to do so. Third, Iran dissociated itself from the reward of up to $2.5 million that had been offered by the 15th Khordad Foundation for Rushdie's murder.

As it happens, far from being a "breakthrough," not a single one of these assertions said anything new. For years now, Teheran has informed the United Kingdom and other European states that it has no intention of carrying out the sentence passed by Ayatollah Khomeini. Already in June 1989, just days after Khomeini himself died, an unofficial Iranian spokesman in London announced that while the death threat would not formally be withdrawn, Teheran was "prepared to let the matter drop." Several months later, Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati made this position formal when he suggested that West European governments "don't need to connect the question of Salman Rushdie to political relations between Iran and those countries."

The Iranians have repeated this

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formulation time and again over the ensuing years. In perhaps the strongest such reiteration, an official of the foreign ministry declared in December 1997 that the Rushdie edict was "a purely religious matter, with which the Iranian government has nothing to do." The government of Germany was proud to claim this statement as one proof of the alleged benefits of its "critical dialogue" with Iran.

Similarly with the second point—encouraging others to kill Rushdie—and similarly again with the third point concerning a financial reward. From both, the Iranian government has conspicuously taken its distance. Thus, in May 1997, to cite but one example, Iran's ambassador to Hungary clearly stated that "Iranian leaders have never said or suggested that someone should kill" Rushdie. And when, in February 1997, the 15th Khordad Foundation announced that it would raise its prize from $2 million to $2.5 million, President Hashemi-Rafsanjani went out of his way to respond that "this foundation is a nongovernmental foundation and its decisions are not related to government policies."

IF KHARRAZI'S statement merely recapitulated longstanding Iranian policy, of greater note was what it did *not* say. Kharrazi neither repudiated the 1989 edict nor limited its scope; he neither took issue with it nor even contested its validity as the basis of government policy. He only gave assurances that the Iranian authorities would not carry it out.

The fact is that, whatever Teheran's diplomats might say, among the Iranian elite there is near-unanimous agreement that the edict against Rushdie is a permanent sentence, one which both constitutes government policy and at the same time is beyond the competence of government to affect.

The brand of Islam practiced in Iran distinguishes between two types of religious pronouncements, a *fatwa* and a *hukm*. The former remains valid only during the lifetime of the religious authority who issues it; the latter continues in effect beyond his death. Despite the Western habit of referring to the edict against Rushdie as a *fatwa*, Iranian spokesmen have universally regarded it as a *hukm*. Thus, Ayatollah Abdallah Javadi-Amoli in February 1997: "This is not a *fatwa* which died with the death of the religious leader who issued it. . . . It is a *hukm* which is permanent and it will stay in place until it is carried out."

There seems to be no dissent among Iranian political leaders that they are powerless to repeal this "unchangeable religious decree" (to quote the deputy chairman of the Iranian parliament's foreign-affairs committee). Only Khomeini could have taken such a step, and he specifically refused to do so. According to the Iranian media, Khomeini admonished his successors before his death never to retreat from the *hukm*, no matter what the pressure: "It should not be permitted for this edict to become a diplomatic issue subject to negotiations." Artfully-worded statements to Western leaders notwithstanding, his heirs have faithfully followed his instructions.

Kharrazi's own understanding of the matter does not differ in the least. Not only did he acknowledge on September 24 that he was saying nothing new, he underlined the point a week later: "We did not adopt a new position with regard to the apostate Salman Rushdie, and our position remains the same as that which has been repeatedly stated by the Islamic Republic of Iran's officials." His words were echoed by an endless series of comments by Iranian politicians, theologians, and news analysts. One newspaper editorialized that "the issue of Rushdie will end only with killing him and all the elements associated with the publishing of the book." A leading ayatollah declared that executing Rushdie remains a duty incumbent on all Muslims "until the day of resurrection." In parliament, 150 of the 270 members signed an open letter stressing the edict's utter irrevocability. The Association of Hezbollah University Students announced it would add a billion rials ($333,000) to the reward for Rushdie's assassin, theological students and clerics in the holy city of Qom pledged a month's salary as an additional bounty, and a small village in northern Iran sweetened the pot by offering his executioner ten carpets, 5,400 square yards of agricultural land, and a house with a garden.

IN SHORT, the threat to Salman Rushdie is as great as it ever was. Indeed, it may be even greater now that he and others have convinced themselves it has ceased to exist. For just as there is no reason to think anything in Iranian policy has changed, there is no reason to believe Kharrazi's assurances. There have been many previous such assurances, and they have hardly prevented attempts on Rushdie's life, including, as he himself revealed in 1997, on the part of Iranian government agents.

Nor are Iranian agents the only potential threat. Fundamentalist Muslims around the world hold Ayatollah Khomeini in uniquely high regard; for them, the death sentence against Rushdie remains a shining legacy, far beyond the control of apparatchiks in Teheran. As the Iranian media emphasized, the edict "is not confined to Iranians alone"; "every committed and free Muslim feels obliged to defend it." Ayatollah Hasan Sane'i, head of the 15th Khordad Foundation, has gone still further: the reward, he has said, "will be paid when the edict is carried out by anybody, Muslim, or non-Muslim, or even Salman Rushdie's bodyguards."

In his voluble reaction to Kharrazi's statement, Rushdie may actually have exacerbated Muslim feelings against him. Gratuitously retracting a statement he had made in 1990 affirming his own Islamic

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faith, he insulted his enemies ("dinosaurs [who] represent absolutely nothing"), called *The Satanic Verses* "an important part of my work," and predicted that "the whole issue will now very rapidly fade into the past." To quote the warning of an Iranian newspaper, this very optimism on the part of Rushdie and his supporters "may even pave the way for a speedier execution of the sentence against him."

The plain truth is that neither Foreign Minister Kharrazi nor, by extension, President Mohammed Khatami clearly speaks with authority for the government of Iran. Time and again, it has become apparent that this president, however "moderate" his own views—and even that is a matter of degree—is not the ultimate power in Teheran. That belongs to the person who now fills Khomeini's position as Iran's spiritual leader—namely, Ali Hoseyni Khamene'i, a politician who has steadily supported the edict and whose hardline followers retained decisive control of Iran's ultimate decision-making body in elections held in late October.

Which only raises the question, why did Kharrazi's statement have so apparently electrifying an effect on Britain and other Western governments? The answer is that governments have the ability, when they wish, to turn non-news into news, and in this case, for reasons of its own, London clearly wanted to do just that. As the Associated Press correctly surmised, "Kharrazi and Cook sought to portray the move as something new and significant as a way to improve ties that have remained strained over the [Rushdie] issue."

And why this push to improve ties? Here, one can hardly do better than to quote Salman Rushdie himself in 1997: "When it's Danish feta cheese or Irish halal beef against the European Convention on Human Rights, don't expect free expression to win." The lure of the Iranian market, however small, is a mighty one. Rushdie has been an impediment to European governments wishing to enter that market. Now, in collusion with Teheran itself, they have found a way to brush the impediment aside.

The Europeans are not alone. Like their British counterparts, American policy-makers, too, have allowed their desire for oil contracts and oil pipelines to cloud the nasty reality, which is that repression, terrorism, and territorial aggressiveness continue to be hallmarks of the Iranian regime, augmented lately by the push to acquire weapons of mass destruction. In early 1998, the U.S. State Department's annual report on terrorism noted correctly that even under President Khatami, no change had occurred in Iran's pattern of violent conduct, and concluded that Iran remains the world's principal state sponsor of terrorism. Higher-ranking State Department officials would have none of this, and simply brushed the report aside. Similarly, the fact that Iran's missile program has accelerated under Khatami has not been permitted to affect the Clinton administration's push for rapprochement with the Islamic Republic.

Just as Rushdie's delusions place him in greater danger, so do parallel delusions among American policy-makers place us, and the world, in greater danger. The sanctions on Iran have been our functional equivalent of bodyguards: passive, open-ended, inconvenient, even annoying, but, under the circumstances, better than nothing at all, and better than any alternative that is likely to be pursued. Just so, Iran's missiles and weapons of mass destruction are the functional equivalents of lurking assassins. Swooning over President Khatami's improved tone, or Foreign Minister Kharrazi's cautious equivocations, will no more protect us from those threats than Salman Rushdie is likely to be protected by his giddy insistence that Ayatollah Khomeini's edict is no more.

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Why We Love Van Gogh

Steven C. Munson

In his book on 19th-century post-Impressionism, the art historian John Rewald described Vincent van Gogh as "the painter of the period who most powerfully captivates today's public." Those words were written in 1956. Four decades later, they are still true, but one can omit the phrase, "of the period." For in the intervening years, van Gogh's appeal has grown to such an extent that he is now generally considered the world's most beloved painter.

Indeed, the current exhibition of his works at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., is a direct result of that popularity.* The show was made possible because the Amsterdam museum that houses these paintings had to be closed for renovation, a renovation required by the fact that when it was built in 1973, it was expected to accommodate 85,000 visitors annually—and last year's attendance topped one million. Several hundred thousand people are expected to see the National Gallery show, which, fortunately, is small enough—70 paintings—to be manageable despite the large crowds. Even more of a blessing is the provenance of the group of paintings on display: they come from the collection that remained in the van Gogh family until the Amsterdam museum was founded to house them.

The man who created these works was born in the Netherlands in March 1853 but did not execute his first oil painting, a still life done in the studio of his cousin, Anton Mauve, until November 1881. By then, he had already failed in two previous attempts to make a career. In 1869, he had joined the international art dealers Groupil & Cie. He worked in their branch offices in the Hague, London, and Paris until 1876, when he was dismissed. After short stints as a teacher, assistant preacher, and bookseller, he began studying to be admitted to the theological faculty in Amsterdam. He abandoned that plan in 1878 to work as an evangelist among coal miners in the Borinage region of southern Belgium.

It was during what Ronald de Leeuw, the editor of van Gogh's letters, calls his "humanitarian phase in the Borinage" that there occurred a "transformation of his love of God . . . into his love of art." In 1880, at the age of twenty-seven, he took up drawing with a passion. According to John Rewald:

> Though he had been an employee in art galleries, he had not previously shown the slightest inclination toward creativeness, and when the desire to draw had at last taken hold of him . . . the best-intentioned adviser could not have discerned in his first sketches the faintest gleam of promise. But with incredible stubbornness and ardor he had worked . . . until his unskilled hand began to follow more and more closely the dictates of his eye and mind.

By 1886, van Gogh had moved to Paris. There he met painters then

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* "Van Gogh's Van Goghs: Masterpieces from the Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam," will remain on view until January 3. It will then travel to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, where it will run from January 17 to April 4.

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associated with the Impressionist movement, including Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, Paul Gauguin, and Emile Bernard, and received encouragement from Camille Pissarro. According to Rewald, Pissarro is supposed to have said later that van Gogh "would either go mad or leave all of us far behind. But I didn't know that he would do both."

ONCE HE had decided to become an artist, Vincent depended for financial support on his younger brother Theo, to whom he was extraordinarily close. Theo would send him money on a regular basis to buy food and supplies, rent space, and hire models, and Vincent would send Theo pictures, often advising him which ones should be set aside as especially good. Theo himself was an art dealer, though never a very successful one; he was evidently quite shy.

Although frustrated by the lack of sales, Vincent later decided that it actually made more sense to accumulate a large number of canvases that could then be presented as his achievement to the world. In effect, this is what happened after his death in 1890, when Theo set about organizing an exhibit of his work. Within six months, however, Theo himself was dead, his grief over the loss of his brother having led to a complete mental breakdown from which he never recovered. The task of figuring out what to do with the paintings then fell to Theo's wife, who also was responsible for saving Vincent's remarkable correspondence with his brother. Thus began the process of selecting, exhibiting, and selling van Gogh's hundreds of works.

Because many of the pictures in the National Gallery show are those that successive family members refused to part with in the decades after van Gogh's death, they link us to the painter in an unusually personal way. For that reason alone, as well as for what they tell us about the nature of van Gogh's art, they deserve special attention. But this is not, it should be pointed out, how critics for the daily press generally have responded to the exhibit. The theme of much of the coverage has been that there really is nothing new or particularly significant to say about the Amsterdam collection, especially since it does not include many of the artist's greatest works, like *Starry Night* (1889).

In fact, however, the show covers all phases of van Gogh's painfully brief career. In addition to providing a record of his artistic development, it contains some of the most powerful and beautiful pictures he ever painted. It also illuminates aspects of van Gogh's artistic program that bear directly on the question of why he exerts such a strong and universal appeal.

ABOUT THAT program, van Gogh was quite explicit. In a letter to Theo in 1882, he wrote:

> What I want to express, in both figure and landscape, isn't anything sentimental or melancholy, but deep anguish. In short, I want to get to the point where people say of my work: that man feels deeply, that man feels keenly.

One need only look at three pictures in the National Gallery exhibition—*The Yellow House* (1888), *Wheatfield with Crows* (1890), and *Landscape at Twilight* (1890)—to see that in this, van Gogh succeeded.

The Yellow House is one of the most hauntingly beautiful paintings in the show. It is based on the house in the southern French town of Arles that van Gogh briefly shared with Paul Gauguin in the fall of 1888. According to one version of events, it was from this house that, after a particularly unpleasant quarrel, Gauguin went for a walk, shortly followed by van Gogh, brandishing a razor. After a brief, silent confrontation, van Gogh retreated to the house. Later that night he cut off his ear, or part of it, and went to a local brothel where he presented it to a prostitute named Rachel before returning home and almost bleeding to death.

Even without knowing this story, one can recognize the atmosphere of foreboding that pervades *The Yellow House*. It depicts a street scene in which a handful of people move about or sit at café tables. There is a sense of great emptiness, though not of space; on the contrary, the picture imparts a distinct air of claustrophobia. The vivid color and impastoed surface do nothing to allay the feeling of unseen menace but rather conspire somehow to produce it. Behind the flattened masses of yellow that make up the street and buildings—accented in the most remarkable way with green shutters, orange roofs, pink awnings, and lilac window-coverings—descends a sky of rich blue. From the quality of light, one cannot tell whether it is day or night—or rather, it seems as if it is both day and night simultaneously. Although the picture is alive with the movement of color and line, in the center sits van Gogh's house, and inside, through the windows, there is only blackness (the actual color is a dark blue).

Van Gogh refers to that blackness—the deep depression with which he struggled throughout his life—many times in his letters to his brother. It is transformed again into art in *Wheatfield with Crows*. What one feels, standing before this picture of an impending storm of unstoppable power, is the painter's courage in trying to face down forces beyond his control. The nature of those forces is suggested in his letters, where he acknowledges more than once that he knows he has behaved badly in some social situation or other (usually involving his family or friends), but adds that he could not help himself—and does not know why.

At one point in his life, van Gogh had feared that, because of his antisocial behavior, his father might try to have him committed to an insti-

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tution. After the incident with Gauguin, he submitted to the demand of townspeople in Arles that he be temporarily locked up. In the last year and a half of his life, he was afflicted with a series of hallucinatory attacks later diagnosed as epileptic psychosis; in May 1889, he put himself in the asylum at Saint-Rémy where he continued to paint.

Van Gogh seems to have had no illusions about his mental illness.* He knew it interfered with his work, and the hallucinatory attacks—during which, he would later learn from doctors, he did things like eat paint—terrified him. In his letters, he repeatedly relates how, despite his difficulties, he is resolved to keep on working as long as he can. In the end, as he himself suspected might happen, the ragings of his unstable mind proved too much to bear. In July 1890, he shot himself in the chest with a pistol, and two days later, in the arms of his brother, he died. He was thirty-seven years old.

HIS OWN consciousness of this unfolding tragedy—and of his inability to prevent it—is most fully expressed in *Landscape at Twilight*. In contrast to *Wheatfield with Crows*—a wild picture with thick strokes of blue, black, yellow, green, and red surging and swirling across the canvas—*Landscape* is almost serene in its beauty. Its imagery—of a path winding past two trees through fields toward a house behind which the fading sky is brightened by sunset—seems unremarkable. Nevertheless, in a mysterious but unmistakable way, it conveys a feeling of indescribable sadness. Looking into the bundle of crooked brushstrokes—black, green, and yellow—that make up the branches of the large tree on the right side of the painting, one finds it difficult to resist the urge to weep.

But not for van Gogh. As he wrote to his brother, he had no wish to become a martyr, and how he was able to avoid that fate is suggested by another statement from his letters that sums up the spirit in which he pursued his art. "Though I am often in the depths of misery," he wrote,

> there is still calmness, pure harmony and music inside me. I see paintings or drawings in the poorest cottages, in the dirtiest corners. My mind is driven toward these things with an irresistible momentum.

Van Gogh's love of the world as he found it—and his decision to make that world the sustaining basis of his art—is manifest in many of the paintings in the National Gallery show, beginning with the earlier works done in a dark palette and with a fairly traditional approach to composition. In pictures like *Scheveningen Beach in Stormy Weather* (1882), *A Pair of Shoes* (1885), *A Basket of Potatoes* (1885), and *The Potato Eaters* (1885), there is a striking congruence between the physicality of what is being represented and the physicality of the paint and brushwork. Up close, some of these surfaces could be considered quite ugly, but the solemn power they convey is undeniable. The subjects are presented for what they are, without refinement, and as a result the images are suffused with dignity.

Van Gogh's credo is even evident in the very different, and far more technically-oriented, Impressionist pictures that follow—such as *The Seine with the Pont de la Grande Jatte* (1887), *Banks of the Seine* (1887), *Courting Couples in the Voyer d'Argenson Park in Asnières* (1887), and *A Park in Spring* (1887). Here the arrangement of strokes, dots, and patches of color triggers repeated sensations of visual and mental pleasure. While influenced by the post-Impressionist Georges Seurat (as well as by Millet, Delacroix, Cézanne, Japanese prints, and English woodcuts), van Gogh steadfastly refused to tie himself down to any artistic system or fixed style. "Do you think that I do not care for technique?" he once wrote to a friend. "Certainly I do, but only in order that I may say what I have to say, and when I cannot yet do that satisfactorily, I try hard to correct myself."

What he cared about, as much as anything else, was color. The "true drawing," he once said, "is modeling with color." Just what he meant by that can be seen in *The Bedroom* (1888), one of his most famous pictures and the most cheerful work in the National Gallery show. Its mood is a direct result of its simplified, childlike forms and pure, perfectly balanced color—a red bedcover against a yellow bed, a rose floor wedged between pale blue walls, an orange table below a green window—but also of the surprising way the painting creates a welcoming sense of space despite the smallness of the room depicted. With its bright colors, flattened images, and seemingly free composition, *The Bedroom* exudes a sense of safety and innocence bordering on helplessness.

An altogether different but no less uplifting emotional experience is afforded by *The Harvest* (1888). One of van Gogh's own favorites, it presents a simple scene of fields, haystacks, laborers, and carts. But through an extraordinary banding and patterning of color, it creates a feeling of almost infinite space and an overpowering sense of tranquility. One feels, simply, absorbed by this picture. And something similar happens when one stands in front of *Wheatfield with a Reaper* (1889). With its blaze of pale green sky, purple mountains, yellow sun, and yellow ocher field of grain, this painting induces a feeling of harmony between man and the world. Van Gogh himself thought it suggested death, which for him may have

* Upon seeing van Gogh's pictures, Cézanne is reported to have said they were the work of a madman. Cézanne's own early works—with their images of murder, rape, and hermaphroditism—suggest a psychic turmoil of their own.

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meant the kind of peace and calm he rarely knew while he was alive.

Wheatfield with a Reaper also points to a key aspect of van Gogh's modernism: the creation of "unnatural" forms—like a green sky, or a sun that sits on the surface of the picture, seeming to have risen from in front of the mountains—that together achieve a self-sustaining autonomy. His genius lay in fusing into a single aesthetic experience an image from nature, the feeling it aroused in him, and the means of recapitulating it. As John Rewald puts it:

> It becomes clear from van Gogh's own commentaries that each subject he chose to paint released in him specific emotions or associations of ideas which he sought to express by means of composition, of simplification, and especially of color. Thus every one of his canvases has a spiritual content, crystallizes a genuine feeling. Though his paintings are of course self-sufficient and do not have to be explained, they convey the obscure impression that they say much more, and much graver things, than appear on their surfaces.

AS FOR what those "graver" things might be, the National Gallery show gives us more than a hint. Looking in particular at *The Harvest* and *Wheatfield with a Reaper*, one becomes aware that what van Gogh's art evokes, time and again, in small ways and large, in one painting after another, is the memory of our own recognition of God's presence in the world. In my view, it is this religious feeling, and the artist's triumph in finding the aesthetic means of recreating it, that accounts for van Gogh's astonishing appeal.

In fact, religion had a place of unique importance in van Gogh's life. The son of a minister, he had tried and failed to be accepted for missionary work. Although he later disavowed the church—motivated at least in part, it seems, by its rejection of him—the impulses that had once made him something of a religious zealot found an equally zealous outlet in his determined drive to become a painter. As an artist, he regarded as a matter of the first importance the question of how to express the kinds of basic human emotions that are associated with a religious response to the world. This was, as it happens, part of a long-running argument he had with Gauguin, who along with Emile Bernard had begun to introduce explicitly religious imagery into his work.

Van Gogh was adamant about the correctness of his own views on the subject. In a letter written in 1889, he bluntly chastised Bernard for "reverting to medieval tapestries" and for trying to paint "abstractions":

> I am telling you about these canvases . . . to remind you that one can express anguish without making direct reference to the actual Gethsemane, and that there is no need to portray figures from the Sermon on the Mount in order to express a comforting and gentle motif.

Van Gogh was animated by the aesthetic conviction that modern painting, if it were to touch people in a way that religious art had once done, had to be rooted in actual experience of the world as well as in the use of color to give expression to that experience. Here lies a key to his artistic program, if one unfortunately slighted in the commentary on the National Gallery show. Not only has very little been said about this aspect of his art, but what has been said has tended to minimize its importance by ascribing it to a kind of idiosyncratic pantheism. This omission probably has something to do with the fact that in general, and except as the target of blasphemy, God does not figure much in current discussions of art. Be that as it may, it is difficult to contemplate "Van Gogh's Van Goghs" without sensing that, in some way, He is in them.

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MUSIC

The Death of the Concert

Terry Teachout

IN 1965, the pianist Glenn Gould made a casual remark that attracted worldwide attention. As he later recalled:

> In an unguarded moment . . . I predicted that the public concert as we know it today would no longer exist a century hence, that its functions would have been entirely taken over by electronic media. It had not occurred to me that this statement represented a particularly radical pronouncement. . . . But never has a statement of mine been so widely quoted—or so hotly disputed.

At the time, Gould's prediction was generally dismissed as the special pleading of a brilliant neurotic. A near-incapacitating case of stage fright had forced him to stop giving concerts in 1964, and thereafter he played only in the recording studio and on radio and TV. To anyone who cared to listen, he stated with assurance that his personal inhibitions were, in effect, the wave of the future.

As it happens, in the 33 years since Gould announced the coming death of the concert, no other classical performer has followed his hermit-like example. Pianists, violinists, and singers continue to crisscross the country, donning evening dress and performing for enthusiastic audiences in concert halls, gymnasiums, and multipurpose arts centers; since 1980, more than 110 new orchestras have been founded in the U.S. "Forget the Stereotype: America Is Becoming a Nation of Culture," read the headline in a front-page story published earlier this year in the *Wall Street Journal*.

Yet in private—and sometimes even in public—promoters and managers are far less sanguine. The loyal concert subscribers of the 60's and 70's are fast approaching retirement age, and younger listeners are so far failing to replace them in sufficiently large numbers. Though opera attendance is up, ticket sales for traditional concert programs are declining: the Phoenix Symphony, for example, claims that it sells about 90 percent of the tickets for its pop concerts, but only 55 percent for its classical programs. (Significantly, opera singers have become the only classical musicians whose activities are routinely covered by the mass media.) At the same time, new recordings of the classics have stopped selling, and many of the major labels are concentrating on pop-flavored "crossover" music.

Why are Americans losing their taste for classical concertgoing? The stock explanation is that secondary schools are devoting less time and money to music education, thus reducing the likelihood that children will be exposed to the classics. This is true enough. But other, more complex historical factors are also at work; if they continue unchecked, Glenn Gould's seemingly outrageous prophecy may well come to pass.

MORE OFTEN than not, a classical concert is a two-hour-long event in which three or four large-scale works by well-known composers of the 18th and 19th centuries are performed by a celebrity soloist (or a celebrity conductor and orchestra). "Modern" music—by which is usually meant

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music composed between 1910 and 1945—is occasionally heard, but popular soloists rarely program pieces written in the last 50 years.

This is not the way things used to be. In the 19th century, opera companies and symphony orchestras programmed new music as a matter of course. In addition, most of the major composers of this new music, including Hector Berlioz, Felix Mendelssohn, Franz Liszt, Frédéric Chopin, Richard Wagner, Richard Strauss, and Gustav Mahler, also had active careers as performers, in the course of which they frequently played or conducted their own works.

Surprising as this may sound, the music that dominates today's concert programs—the works of the past that, taken together, comprise what is known as the "standard repertoire"—was largely unfamiliar to 19th-century concertgoers, as indeed it was to many performers. Baroque music, for example, was heard only in romanticized transcriptions. Of the large-scale instrumental works of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven, only a few were performed with any regularity, and Schubert's instrumental music was all but unknown.

The change occurred as 19th-century music grew technically more complex. In time, it became increasingly common for conductors and instrumentalists to leave the job of composition to specialists, while they themselves came to specialize in the art of performance. These new, noncomposing virtuosos were naturally more inclined to explore the output of older composers, and their programs came to be increasingly devoted to the music of the past. By World War I, the age of the composer-performer was drawing to a close (Sergei Rachmaninoff was the last important composer who also toured extensively as a celebrity virtuoso), and soloists and orchestras were programming old and new music in roughly equal proportions.

The decline of the composer-performer coincided with the rise of the modern movement in music. The listening public initially resisted modernism, but no more so than it had resisted such "advanced" composers as Liszt, Wagner, and Brahms. For a while, therefore, it seemed reasonable to believe that the music of the tonal modernists—Béla Bartók, Aaron Copland, Paul Hindemith, Francis Poulenc, Sergei Prokofiev, Igor Stravinsky, Ralph Vaughan Williams, and their many followers in Europe and America—would eventually find favor among concertgoers.

Instead, history intervened. The Russian Revolution and the subsequent Nazi takeover of Germany led to the installation of reactionary cultural commissars who sought to extirpate modernism from the European musical scene, if necessary by brute force. At the same time, dozens of famous soloists and conductors emigrated to the United States, among them the pianists Vladimir Horowitz, Artur Schnabel, and Rudolf Serkin; the violinists Jascha Heifetz and Fritz Kreisler; the conductors Serge Koussevitzky, George Szell, Arturo Toscanini, and Bruno Walter; and the members of the Budapest and Busch String Quartets.

Not surprisingly, these extraordinarily talented artists quickly found favor with American listeners (particularly in light of the fact that there were as yet no native-born conductors or instrumentalists of comparable distinction). But few of them played any but the most conservative of new music. The only famous émigré to take a serious and sustained interest in American music was Koussevitzky, under whose leadership the Boston Symphony became the sole first-tier American orchestra consistently to premiere new scores by young American composers.

Much the same thing was true of the Central European émigrés who would thereafter make up a significant portion of the American *audience* for classical music. For them, the canon of 19th-century classics was a source of emotional reassurance—a way of reconstituting the lost world of prewar Europe. And many, one suspects, came subconsciously to associate musical modernism with the political chaos they had gratefully left behind.

By war's end, a seemingly unbridgeable chasm had opened between younger modernist composers and conservative audiences. Many such composers retreated into the academy, there to write willfully abstruse music that was in turn ignored by most listeners. Thus it was that the postwar classical-music business came to be based almost entirely on performances by celebrity artists of the standard repertoire.

The introduction in 1948 of the long-playing record served to consolidate the hold exerted by the music of the past on the classical-music industry. Between 1948 and 1970, the major labels released hundreds of top-selling recordings of the standard repertoire by a new generation of musical celebrities, including the sopranos Maria Callas and Elisabeth Schwarzkopf; the baritone Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau; the pianists Van Cliburn, Glenn Gould, and Dinu Lipatti; and the conductors Leonard Bernstein, Herbert von Karajan, and Georg Solti.

To be sure, these artists were also powerful presences on the concert stage. But it was recordings, not concerts, that made them stars. And although Gould was the only one who ultimately decided to specialize in recording, there is no question that the others took it every bit as seriously as live performance—if not more so. "I do not want to give any more concerts," Lipatti told Walter Legge, his producer, not long before his untimely death in 1950, "except perhaps as rehearsals for recording. Let us give our lives to making records together."

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But the success of the LP also created the conditions that eventually brought about the current crisis of the concert. With the advent of the digital compact disc, it became possible to reissue the classic recordings of the 50's and 60's in a durable, modern-sounding format; the major labels, having long ago amortized their investment in these recordings, thereupon proceeded to market them at lower prices than new versions by younger artists. The result was the near-total paralysis of the classical-recording industry. For why would the average record buyer, having purchased a digitally remastered CD of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony by Karajan and the Berlin Philharmonic, want to acquire a more expensive, less interesting new recording by a younger conductor?

Nor did the unintended consequences of recording stop there. By the mid-60's, it was possible to purchase high-quality renditions of virtually every important piece of classical music composed prior to 1910. Similarly, good-sounding hi-fi systems had become cheap enough for anyone to own. An entire generation of music lovers thus became accustomed to experiencing classical music not in the concert hall but at home. As the Horowitzes and Bernsteins died off, these listeners began to question the need to attend *any* public performances of the classics, whether by callow young artists or by middle-aged celebrity performers who had already committed their repertoires to disc one or more times.

To understand the implications of this change in attitude, one need only look at the programs of the famous soloists who are performing at Carnegie Hall this season, most of them playing works they have previously recorded. Thus, among pianists, Daniel Barenboim is doing the Liszt B-Minor Sonata; Alfred Brendel is offering a series of recitals devoted to solo piano music, chamber music, and song cycles by Haydn, Schubert, and Mozart; Maurizio Pollini is playing the Schumann C-Major Phantasie and the Chopin B-Flat Minor Sonata; and Andras Schiff is performing Bartók's three piano concertos.

No doubt all of these concerts will be worth hearing, and some may well be exceptional. But to what extent is it reasonable to expect that Alfred Brendel has something so dramatically new to say about the Schubert A-Major Sonata, D. 959, that it is worth paying $60 to hear him play it in person? For the veteran concertgoer, the answer is obvious: recordings are at best a pale substitute for the immediate experience of live performance. But for the younger person who can sit in his living room and listen to the same sonata being performed by Pollini, Schiff, Vladimir Ashkenazy, Richard Goode, Murray Perahia, or Artur Schnabel—not to mention Brendel himself—this argument is unlikely to withstand close scrutiny.

Truly charismatic performers, of course, will presumably always be able to draw enthusiastic crowds. But charisma is in remarkably short supply among the present generation of instrumentalists. This season, for example, Carnegie Hall is presenting in recital only one instrumental soloist under the age of fifty, the pianist Evgeny Kissin, who can genuinely be said to have something of the same galvanizing appeal as the great virtuosos of the past.

GIVEN ALL this, how can the public concert continue to compete with the concert-hall-of-the-mind that has been made possible by the introduction of the compact disc? Is there a musically serious alternative to the lowest-common-denominator pops programs that are becoming increasingly prevalent outside America's major cities? Consider two recent orchestral concerts, one in New York and the other in San Francisco.

In September, the New York Philharmonic, America's oldest orchestra, opened its season with a two-week-long Beethoven festival conducted by its music director, Kurt Masur. Not only is Masur a superlative interpreter of Beethoven, but this was the first time the Philharmonic had performed the nine symphonies in chronological order since Toscanini led a similar cycle in 1942. Yet critical responses ranged from measured praise to open hostility, and it was hard to escape the feeling that by launching the season in so conventional a manner, Masur and the Philharmonic had demonstrated yet again the extent to which they are out of touch with the changing realities of contemporary concertgoing.

In the same week as the first installment of Masur's Beethoven cycle, Michael Tilson Thomas and the San Francisco Symphony presented a program that typified a radically different approach: Charles Ives's *From the Steeples and the Mountains*, Henry Cowell's *Music 1957*, Samuel Barber's *Knoxville: Summer of 1915*, and the Mahler First Symphony. It was obvious on entering the hall that the audience was far younger than that which turned out to hear Masur and the Philharmonic. No less surprising was the way the concert began: Thomas came on stage and spoke lucidly and engagingly about the complexities of the Ives piece. As a result, the audience, which might otherwise have found the composition impossibly difficult, responded to it with unfeigned enthusiasm.

I should stress that there was no significant difference in the musical quality of the two concerts. The New York Philharmonic is a better orchestra than the San Francisco Symphony, but not by much, and Thomas and Masur are both greatly gifted conductors. The difference, rather, was in the program—and the attitude behind it. The German-born Masur remains deeply attached to the traditional concept of the public concert as an occasion for music-lovers to hear

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live performances by well-known musicians of the accepted canon of 18th- and 19th-century classics. Thomas, who was born and trained in America (and who is seventeen years younger than Masur), believes just as deeply that in order to attract younger listeners, it is necessary to offer them a different kind of musical experience, one that goes beyond merely duplicating what is readily available on record.

The electrifying effect that Thomas has had on San Francisco audiences suggests one possible solution to the problem of the concert: change its focus from old music to new. Especially now that atonality and serialism have run their course, there is no good reason why American soloists and orchestras, as often as they perform the music of Beethoven, Brahms, or Tchaikovsky, should not also be playing the masterpieces of the earlier tonal modernists, including the Americans among them like Ives and Barber—as well as the accessible yet challenging music of such "new tonalists" as Daniel Asia, Aaron Jay Kernis, Paul Moravec, Lowell Liebermann, and George Tsontakis.*

WHY DO we need new music? Because without it, our musical culture will sicken and die—as it came perilously close to doing in the 60's and 70's when "new music" more often than not meant ugly music, and concertgoers learned from hard experience to reject in advance any piece composed after 1945. Throughout this period, concertgoers were forced to look exclusively to performers, not creative artists, as sources of novelty and vitality. The resulting concentration on celebrity performances of the standard repertoire, though understandable, was nonetheless unhealthy: even the greatest masterpieces can temporarily lose their savor from overexposure. This is exactly what has happened to much of the standard repertoire, and it is why the institution of the classical concert is in trouble.

To be sure, Kurt Masur and the New York Philharmonic are not having trouble selling tickets—yet. Beethoven cycles and Tchaikovsky nights continue to draw crowds, and the celebrity system is still the backbone of the classical-music business. But the point of diminishing returns, especially outside the largest urban areas, has clearly been reached, and the recent experience of the classical-recording industry suggests that it is no less essential for soloists and orchestras to rethink the way they do business.

If they do not, the concert hall will someday become a place where old men and women gather forlornly to listen to the same symphonies and concertos they first heard a half-century ago, while their children, if they are interested in classical music at all, will stay home and listen to compact discs or whatever newer marvel is destined to replace them.

* These composers, and the larger musical movement of which they are a part, are discussed in my article, "The New Tonalists" (COMMENTARY, December 1997).

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Books in Review

The Vision Thing

A World Transformed
by George Bush
and Brent Scowcroft
Knopf. 568 pp. $30.00

Reviewed by
Robert Kagan

A SMART President chooses his successors wisely. As the Clinton administration flails amid the unraveling of the international economic and political order, George Bush looks more and more like a giant. Among foreign-policy cognoscenti, the team of Bush, Brent Scowcroft, James Baker, Colin Powell, and Dick Cheney has already earned a reputation for smoothness and competence that stands in rather striking contrast to the clunky hesitance and indecision of the Clintonites. When Secretary of State Madeleine Albright protested in a recent interview that the Bush team had a simpler job—"they had a different world to deal with in which the parameters were fairly set"—she paid unwitting tribute to the fact that Bush and his colleagues had a knack for making some of the hardest plays look easy. Then, too, the Bush administration actually won a few, and winning always looks easy in retrospect.

An air of easy confidence certainly pervades *A World Transformed*, written by Bush and Scowcroft, his top national-security adviser. In recounting their time in office, the two men are surprisingly frank and genial, willing to reveal small embarrassments—like the fact that Scowcroft often fell asleep in meetings—as well as larger errors of judgment. Such frankness makes for unusually interesting reading. Indeed, the novel construction of these memoirs—the two take turns telling their story, each from his own point of view—lifts them well above the monotony of other such accounts and produces a rounded picture of foreign-policy-making in the Bush years, at least as seen from the White House.

The open and often self-deprecating tone of *A World Transformed* must owe a lot to a conviction on the part of both men that their historical reputations are fairly secure. Whatever their failings—and these appear less significant as today's debacles unfold—things did turn out pretty well on their watch. The Soviet empire collapsed. The Gulf war was won. Although Bush left behind a number of ticking time-bombs—the raging war in Bosnia, the unresolved crisis in Haiti, a North Korea well on its way toward developing nuclear weapons, Saddam Hussein still in charge in Baghdad—he will not likely be blamed for them. Who today blames Eisenhower for the unresolved mess he left in Vietnam?

It also should be said that Bush and Scowcroft deserve to enjoy their successes now, since they certainly never had a chance to enjoy them while in office. One of the most refreshing things about their account is the candor with which they reveal not only the difficulties they faced in trying to shape American foreign policy at the end of the cold war but also the uncertainty and insecurity they felt in confronting those difficulties. Contrary to Secretary

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Albright's suggestion, things were never that easy for George Bush.

Few are likely to remember that Bush's first two years were hardly glorious. Even though many wonderful things were happening around the world, he had a hard time finding his footing. As he reveals here, he was deeply wounded by charges that he lacked Ronald Reagan's "vision," and he especially resented the fact that people seemed to value Reagan's rhetorical abilities more than what he considers to be his own deeper grasp of the complexities.

Unlike Reagan, Bush intended to be a "'hands-on' President," and he was also determined to chart his own course in foreign policy. This, however, was problematic, for even in hindsight it is not exactly clear what Bush and Scowcroft thought Reagan had done wrong, or what they planned to do differently. Moreover, Bush's determination to establish his own identity as a world leader had a cost. Instead of trying to hit the ground running, which would have meant proceeding along the course Reagan had charted, he and Scowcroft launched a lengthy "strategic review." It took the bureaucracy almost two months to produce this review—which amounted to nothing—and by that time Eastern Europe was exploding and the Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev was running circles around Bush in the international propaganda war. By the spring of 1989, critics in Congress and in the press were charging that the administration had no strategy and was adrift.

Of course, any American administration would have had a hard time keeping up with the rapid changes. But it was also true that, as critics complained at the time, Bush's reaction was achingly cautious. This caution had the perverse effect of making him appear more conservative about change in the Soviet empire than Gorbachev himself. In the summer of 1989, for example, Gorbachev renounced the Brezhnev Doctrine, signaling that Warsaw Pact nations like Hungary and Poland would be allowed to leave the socialist camp. But when Bush visited Poland four days later, he was actually concerned lest the crowds he drew be too big and too joyous. As it turned out, the carefully planned events, as Scowcroft sadly recalls, were "sparsely attended by the citizens of Warsaw."

Bush's wary approach to Eastern Europe did more than deprive him of good photo-ops. It also shaped his attitude toward the central players in the drama, making him generally more sympathetic to the dictators who were trying to control pressures for reform than to the democrats who were expressing popular demands for more radical change. Bush plainly admired Poland's General Wojciech Jaruzelski, for instance, whom he found "charming," possessed of a good sense of humor, and, above all, impressively patriotic, and he concludes his account of the overthrow of Communism in Poland with a paean not to Lech Walesa but to Jaruzelski. This same preference extended to Hungary and Czechoslovakia and, of course, the Soviet Union.

There, Gorbachev was being challenged not only by hard-line opponents of his reforms but also by Boris Yeltsin, who was demanding faster and more sweeping changes in the Soviet system. Bush, for the most part, sided with Gorbachev in this struggle—and indeed, by the end of his first year in office, had far outstripped his predecessor Ronald Reagan in treating Gorbachev as an indispensable ally. His memoirs reveal that at the very heart of the "new world order" he envisioned for the post-cold-war era lay the U.S.-Soviet partnership. Moreover, he became convinced that his "personal diplomacy" with

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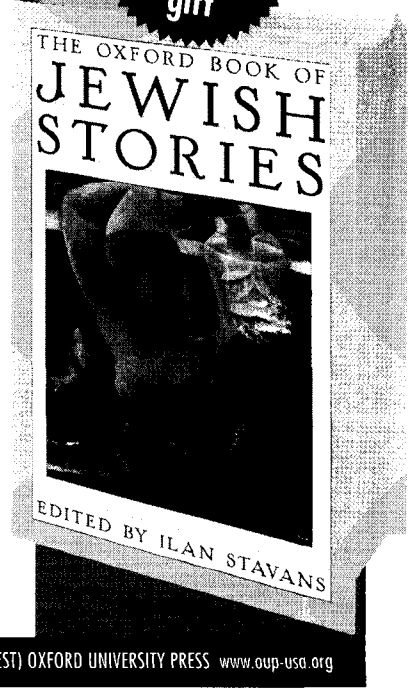

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Gorbachev was the key to all the successes of his first two years in office, from the bloodless demise of the Warsaw Pact, to the smooth reunification of Germany and its incorporation into NATO, to the unprecedented international unity in response to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait.

This commitment to Gorbachev put Bush on a collision course with the democratic forces that were mounting against both the Soviet leader and the Soviet Union itself. When the crisis came to a head in the summer of 1991, Bush and his advisers consistently sided with Gorbachev against Yeltsin and against the republics seeking liberation from Moscow's central control. "Whatever the course, however long the process took, and whatever its outcome," Bush writes, "I wanted to see stable, and above all peaceful, change." This was the concern that lay behind his famous statement to the Ukrainian people in August 1991, in what immediately became known as the "Chicken Kiev" speech, that the U.S. would "not support those who seek independence in order to replace a far-off tyranny with a local despotism."

Even when it became clear, after the failed coup attempt by Soviet hard-liners in August 1991, that both Gorbachev and the Soviet Union were finished, Bush and most of his advisers were reluctant to let go. Scowcroft found it "painful to watch Yeltsin rip the Soviet Union brick by brick away from Gorbachev." At an NSC meeting at the beginning of September, Bush and his advisers were unclear even as to whether the break-up of the Soviet Union was in America's interest. Only Cheney argued forcefully that it was, and that the U.S. should carry out an aggressive policy "to lead and shape events."

Did it matter that Bush was too cautious? In retrospect, despite his professed concern about overplaying America's hand and inviting catastrophe, Bush acknowledges that a faster pace of change would not "have proved hazardous." But both Bush and Scowcroft also admit that in the end their actions did not make much difference. In fact, the most that can be said of their policy toward the crumbling Soviet empire was that it followed the Hippocratic oath: they did no harm.

EVEN THIS much cannot be said, however, of Bush's other top foreign-policy priority: expanding America's relationship with China. As he came into office, Bush must have harbored enormous hopes for ushering in a new era of Sino-American cooperation and friendship. He was uniquely suited to the role. Having served as envoy to China, he knew the leadership well and prided himself on understanding the Chinese character.

At the end of February 1989, Bush rushed off to Beijing for a meeting with Deng Xiaoping and other leaders, becoming the first President ever to visit Asia before Europe. Less than four months later, the Chinese dictatorship launched its brutal crackdown on the demonstrators in Tiananmen Square, put a tight lid on the political reform movement that had been growing since the early 1980's, and turned a defiant face to the rest of the world. Bush did not share the general outrage. To some, he writes, it might have appeared that China was "still the dictatorship it had always been," but "I believed otherwise." His chief worry was that the massacre would damage "our hard-won gains" by provoking an angry backlash in the United States.

Bush and Scowcroft devote fewer than two of their 22 chapters to the Chinese debacle, and for good reason. As James Baker recounts in his own memoirs, the administration's China policy essentially consisted of three-and-a-half years of "treading water." Bush was sympathetic when the Chinese dictators told him that their people yearned for stability more than for freedom, and he worked hard to blunt anti-Chinese sentiments in the U.S. Whenever he and Scowcroft did communicate dissatisfaction to the Chinese leadership, they indicated that they were doing so only in response to enormous political pressure at home. Although Bush may at times have been uncomfortable with this approach—he wrote in his diary on June 20, 1989, "I'm sending signals to China that we want the relationship to stay intact, but it's hard when they're executing people"—he firmly believed it was far more important to preserve the relationship than to "lecture" the Chinese about their moral shortcomings.

Bush also assumed that the United States could do little to affect Chinese behavior by means of pressure or threats. But as with the break-up of the Soviet Union, only more damningly, he underestimated the power of American influence. Even supporters of Bush's general approach (like the Sinologist Harry Harding) concede that his repeated assurances to Deng made it easier for the Chinese leadership to resist international demands for more moderate behavior at home. Nor did Bush take advantage of a rare and fleeting opportunity to harness such demands. At an economic summit in Paris in July 1989, when the Europeans (!) were calling for severe sanctions against China, Bush led the charge for much softer penalties. "Ironically," Scowcroft writes, "European ardor soon cooled and it was not long before the United States was virtually the only nation with any sanctions still operating." Ironically—and, one might add, inevitably.

At their meeting in Beijing soon after the crackdown, Deng told Scowcroft that the burden for improving relations fell to the United States, and he employed a Chinese proverb: "It is up to the person who tied the knot to untie it." Bush and Scowcroft shared Deng's view that it was for the United States to un-

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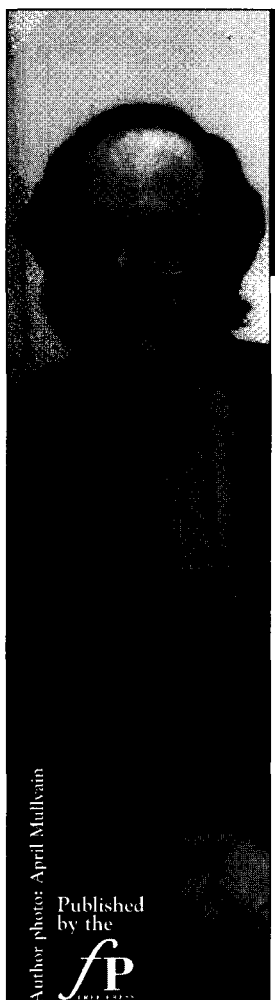
tie the "knot" by making concessions. But it was the Chinese who had tied it, by slaughtering their own people. On July 9, 1989, Bush confided in his diary that there was "nothing that I really want China to do in order to solve the existing problem of strained relations." This is an apt summary of his China policy—as it remains, unfortunately, of American policy today.

The high point of the Bush presidency, and Bush's own finest hour, was of course the Gulf war. More than anything else, the American victory in Desert Storm established the administration's reputation for bold, decisive, and effective action. Again contrary to Secretary Albright, Bush's accomplishment was anything but easy. As he laboriously tried to construct the case for war in the months between the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 and the launching of Desert Storm in January 1991, he faced huge obstacles, not the least of them being his own team of advisers.

The Bush administration had blundered badly *before* the invasion. Although Scowcroft insists here that "Saddam would have done what he did" regardless of American policy, that is a rather self-serving fatalism. As Michael R. Gordon and Bernard E. Trainor have argued in their masterful account of the Gulf crisis (*The Generals' War*, 1995), Iraq's invasion might have been averted had the administration, and especially Colin Powell, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, been willing to deploy military forces when Saddam began building up along the Kuwaiti border. A 1979 Pentagon study, drafted by Paul Wolfowitz, later to become Bush's Undersecretary of Defense, had foreseen the possibility of such an Iraqi move and recommended that the U.S. intervene "early . . . before hostilities began." In the days before the invasion, however, Powell refused to move even an aircraft carrier to the Gulf. Scowcroft, fearful of offending Arab sensitivities, believed "this was not a time to posture and threaten." That was a disastrous miscalculation.

As is well-known, Powell proved an even bigger problem after the invasion. From the beginning, Secretary of Defense Cheney and Wolfowitz wanted the United States to declare the invasion unacceptable and undertake efforts to reverse it. But Powell, as Gordon and Trainor recount, only wanted to defend Saudi Arabia. And as for Baker, he, according to Bush and Scowcroft, was not much better than Powell. "From the beginning of the crisis," Bush recalls, "Baker was reluctant to contemplate [the use of force] and believed strongly that diplomacy and sanctions should be given every chance to get the job done." Among the administration's most prominent players, only Scowcroft, Cheney,



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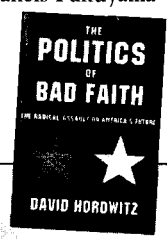

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Wolfowitz, and Deputy Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger fully supported Bush's valiant demand that the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait "must not stand."

At home, Bush also faced opposition from prominent conservatives and respected military figures who warned of mammoth American casualties. By far his biggest problem, however, was the Democratic party—Secretary Albright's party. Then-Senate majority leader George Mitchell stubbornly opposed the use of military power, placing his hopes instead on the dubious proposition that one or two years of international sanctions would do the trick. He was supported in this by almost the entire party, including such stalwarts as Sam Nunn and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, who argued that "All that's happened is that one nasty little country invaded a littler but just as nasty country." Only ten out of 55 Senate Democrats voted in favor of the resolution authorizing force.

Finally, Bush's masterful assembling of a grand international coalition against Saddam was also not as easy as it looks in retrospect. The Clinton administration these days likes to excuse its own bungled efforts against Saddam by claiming that Bush had an advantage: it was far simpler to persuade the world of the need to reverse Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. But this ignores the historical record. In preparing for U.S. action, Bush faced a nervous and reluctant Saudi royal family and an uncertain Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, who initially preferred an "Arab" solution to the problem. Jordan's King Hussein had openly cast his lot with Saddam. Cooperation with the Soviet Union was sporadic, and all but collapsed when Yevgeny Primakov rose to ascendancy in Moscow's policy-making councils. Bush's ability to pull Arabs and Europeans together was an astounding and underappreciated feat of diplomacy and will.

WHAT MADE Bush so uncharacteristically bold, while so many were so feckless? In these memoirs he repudiates the widespread belief that Margaret Thatcher lent him some of her steely spine at a critical moment. Rather, it seems that, in response to Saddam's treachery, Bush himself had a blinding flash of moral clarity. In the first two months after the invasion, Bush recalls, "I began to move from viewing Saddam's aggression exclusively as a dangerous strategic threat and an injustice to its reversal as a *moral crusade*"(emphasis added):

> [Saddam's] disdain for international law, his misrepresentation of what had happened, his lies to his neighbors all contributed, but perhaps it was hearing of the destruction of life in Kuwait which sealed the matter. I became very emotional about the atrocities. They really gave urgency to my desire to do something active in response. . . .
>
> [A]t some point it came through to me that this was not a matter of shades of gray, or of trying to see the other side's point of view. It was good versus evil, right versus wrong.

There was something about Saddam's naked aggression, his deception and brutality, that cut through Bush's studied realism, clarified his moral ambivalence, and blasted away his innate caution. While James Baker was lamely trying to explain the American interest in the Gulf as "jobs, jobs, jobs," Bush was working on another level entirely—one might go so far as to call it Reaganesque.

Would that he had risen to such heights on more than this one occasion. Critical readers might well ask where his sense of moral outrage was when atrocities even greater than Saddam's were taking place in Bosnia (a subject not touched on by Bush and Scowcroft). Or why, in China, Bush's concern for "right versus wrong" had so little impact on his policies. Or indeed why, in the endgame of the Iraq war itself, he failed to see his "moral crusade" through to its necessary conclusion, ridding the world once and for all of Saddam's evil. In Bush's account of the Gulf crisis, one gets a glimpse, but only a glimpse, of the President that might have been.

WHAT, THEN, does it all add up to? It is too early for a definitive historical verdict on Bush and his administration, if such a thing is ever possible. Compared to what followed, Bush and his team did an admirable and, in the case of the Gulf war, even a heroic job. Yet it is clear, even from these memoirs, that the administration's foreign policy was in most other respects unspectacular, or worse. In the case of the Soviet empire, the world was transformed through no particular action of the Bush administration's. The decisive acts of American foreign policy were Reagan's. In the case of China, Bush made no breakthroughs even by his own questionable definition of what such breakthroughs might have entailed. And the failure to finish off Saddam in Iraq, when the U.S. manifestly had the power to do so, may prove one of the most egregious errors of the post-cold-war era.

There is another, larger sense in which Bush failed. His lack of the "vision thing" really did have unfortunate consequences. With the fall of the Soviet Union, the United States had by necessity to assume an even more central role in world affairs than ever before. It had, indeed, become the sole power undergirding the "new world order." Bush knew this, but his weakness as a popular leader combined with his deeply ingrained suspicion of "moral crusades" (except in Iraq), made him unable and unwilling to play the role of leader and educator that the American people so badly needed in their President.

To be sure, Bill Clinton deserves most of the blame for squandering the power, both moral and materi-

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al, that the United States possessed at the end of the cold war. But it was Bush who—to his own political detriment—failed to articulate the necessary vision. In normal times, competence may be enough; but these were not normal times. They are becoming less so by the minute.

The Joy of Limits

Kaaterskill Falls
by Allegra Goodman
Dial. 324 pp. $23.95

Reviewed by
Ruth R. Wisse

I never thought I would live to see a Jewish novel of manners. By the time modern Jews began to write novels, they no longer *had* manners—if by manners we mean those restraining, thoroughly integrated customs of a coherent society, the merest breach of which forces a crisis. Consider Jane Austen's charming Emma: what great harm does she do when she quips about the dullness of Mrs. Bates in that tiresome lady's presence? Surely, by that point in *Emma*, every reader is ready to accept the justice of the heroine's observation and is probably grateful for her wit. Yet Emma's rudeness elicits from Mr. Knightley the most stinging rebuke in her moral education, teaching her what it means to cause another person pain. Emma comes to love Mr. Knightley in the course of coming to love the good. The precipitating factor is a single tactless remark made at a picnic lunch.

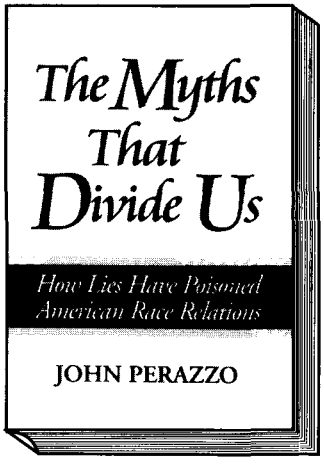
Wherever in modern Jewish literature could one hope to find such a scene? Traditional Jewish society was, of course, hyperattentive to manners—except that, having conceived of them at the elevated status of religiously sanctioned deeds and misdeeds, it could hardly treat them lightly enough for literary play. The Jewish God was no Mr. Knightley. As for modern Jews, many of them did indeed lower the temperature of their faith, treating sins as social lapses, religious festivals as family gatherings. But their flight from tradition destroyed the very fabric from which a socially substantive literature could be woven.

Then, in the early decades of this century, history took the place of the avenging God. "For the time being, we have no room for a great literature," laments a would-be novelist in a work by the American Yiddish writer Jacob Glatstein:

> Do you know why? Because a great literature is a literature dealing with trifles—little pleasures, little cares, little everyday happenings, little people with little

Ruth R. Wisse, *whose essays and reviews appear regularly in these pages, is professor of Yiddish literature and comparative literature at Harvard.*

Debunking the Myth of a Racist America



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> worries, little hatreds, little loves, little wives and little children, how they work and what they do in their spare time. We have never known the peace necessary to create such a literature.

Glatstein wrote this in 1939, when history was preparing the grounds for a literature of Jewish martyrs and heroes rather than ordinary human beings engaged in ordinary human tasks; the true Jewish novel, he felt, would have to wait.

How VERY clever of Allegra Goodman to perceive in contemporary America the place and time in which a small group of Jews could finally be casual enough about the wrath of both God and history, yet attentive enough to the social discipline instilled by their religion, to produce a context for the novel of manners. Indeed, from her very first short story, published in this magazine when she was still a Harvard undergraduate,* Allegra Goodman revealed a special talent for close social observation. Sidestepping the obligatory first-person maiden narrative about how my sinister family made me the sensitive person I am, she wrote confidently about educated Jews who knew something about *kashrut* and Israel but seemed stuck in terminal, American-style, adolescence. Giving readers the benefit of her own curiosity about the dishes being served, the books being read, the cars being driven, and especially the ideas in conversational play, she looked out at the adult Jewish world around her with a knowing, amused indulgence.

For her first novel, *The Family Markowitz* (1996), Goodman brought together her stories about these Jews, members of a dispersed clan who are almost too weightless, morally and socially, for the intelligence she consecrates to them. Now, in *Kaaterskill Falls*, she has switched gears, abandoning her old, mainly liberal cast of characters for the religiously and socially conservative world of the Orthodox.

Not just any Orthodox. The dominant presence of *Kaaterskill Falls*, Rav Elijah Kirshner, left Germany just before *Kristallnacht* in 1938, resettling with hundreds of his followers in upper Manhattan. In the 1950's, he had urged them to use the reparations payments they were receiving from Germany to buy summer property in rural Kaaterskill, a two-hour drive from New York City. It is there that Goodman situates most of her novel, during those summering months in the countryside when families linger on the porch through long Sabbath afternoons, engaging in apparently inconsequential actions and conversations that let a novelist make much out of little.

A sociological rarity even within Orthodoxy, the "Kirshners" accept the dynastic leadership of their rabbi in the manner of Hasidic Jews, but follow traditions that are sinewy-rational, not ecstatic. Goodman bases the theology of the Kirshners on the 19th-century teachings of Samson Raphael Hirsch, who encouraged traditionalist Jews to receive a secular education—the better to withstand the challenges of modernity—while at the same time separating themselves from Jews who deviated from religious law. This tension between intellectual independence and religious discipline characterizes Rav Kirshner and permeates the novel.

As Goodman says of her protagonists, their religion is not something they can cast off; it is part of them. Their rituals are not rituals to them, but instincts. Still, since they speak English and not Yiddish, there is nothing to inhibit their interactions with the Gentile town librarian, physician, judge, and handymen, as well as with other Jews whose own religious observance happens to have lapsed to varying degrees. Thus, the Kirshner summer colony, situated among Gentiles and assorted modern Jews, experiences many of the ordinary pleasures and frictions of American small-town life, although the adjustment of the various groups to one another is hardly simple and indeed provides one of the many springs of the novel's action.

That action is carefully dated between the summer of 1976 and the spring of 1978, when the rabbi, who has suffered a stroke, collapses and dies and the mantle of his leadership passes to his younger son Isaiah. The rabbi, who in Europe had forged a synthesis of Jewish religious observance and German culture, never lost his intellectual confidence even in the process of his uprooting. But his repressed grief for all that he was forced to abandon has frightened his two sons into giving up either one or the other side of his fused legacy. Jeremy, the elder, has become a secular professor, afraid of assuming any responsibility for a family or a community of his own. The dutiful Isaiah, substituting severity for authority, runs the community that he inherits from his father "like a Tudor court in Washington Heights."

The main character of the novel, Elizabeth Shulman, a young mother of five, becomes the unwitting proving-ground of the changing of the guard when she wins the old Rav's consent to open a kosher grocery store for the Kirshner summer community. The indiscretion that precipitates her crisis is different from Emma's insult of Mrs. Bates: it offends religious discipline rather than another human being. By agreeing to cater a private birthday party with food from beyond her rabbi's sphere of supervision, Elizabeth knows she is testing the limits: "Of course, the Rav did not forbid her to bring up food from outside Washington Heights, but he did not give her permission either." Still, her enthusiasm wins out over prudence, provoking Isaiah, in one of his first acts as the new rabbi, to rescind the consent his father had given her.

To be sure, we are meant to un-

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derstand that Isaiah's slight to Elizabeth's dignity is far worse than her transgression against rabbinic jurisdiction, since he is shoring up his power rather than his community or his religion. But *she* must accept his ruling; no more than her customers would she herself defy the rabbi's injunction. Her adjustment to this blow constitutes the act of renunciation that defines the moral drama at the heart of *Kaaterskill Falls*.

Elizabeth is both submissive and resilient. Though her dream of autonomy is crushed, her spirit toughens. Just when she is feeling most defeated, one of her Kaaterskill neighbors, a Hungarian immigrant and lapsed Orthodox Jew by the name of Andras Melish, says to her conspiratorially, "This is the United States of America. You can do whatever you damn well please."

> She stares at him. She has not heard words like these spoken to her before. No one has ever put it to her this way. As if she could act without questions and considerations. Without permission. As if she could really do what she wanted and weren't connected to anybody, the Kehilla [community] or the children.
>
> She bursts out laughing. All around her the party is humming and the children are dashing in and out. The coatrack is melting away under the load of coats. . . . Elizabeth just laughs. It is delightful; it is funny. Not so much the truth of what Andras has said, but the novelty of hearing it.

If the laughing heroine of Jane Austen has to be reined in by moral discipline, the overdisciplined heroine of Allegra Goodman has to be liberated by laughter. At the end of the novel, Elizabeth tells Andras it is the memory of his words that prompted her to approach her local grocer for a job—words he never dreamt she would take seriously. Elizabeth does not accept their "truth," in the sense that she is hardly about to do whatever she damn well pleases. Yet America has put the choice into her hands, and made the consequences of choice hers to bear. As it says in *Ethics of the Fathers*, "Who is a hero? He who stifles his urge." By exposing us to Elizabeth's restlessness, Goodman has created a genuine heroine—one who stifles her urge. Judaism and the novel of manners are hereby perfectly aligned.

Like the teaching of Rav Kirshner, this novel points in contradictory directions, inward to the specifically Jewish and outward to the embrace of America. Goodman's description of the difficult succession from the Rav to his younger son quite brilliantly suggests how and why in contemporary Jewish life Orthodoxy can become "ultra-Orthodoxy," how behavior becomes stricter, more defensive, more rigid. And the personal rivalry between the brothers Jeremy and Isaiah hints at why the cultural rivalry between the secular and religious branches of American Jewry is unlikely to go away. At the same time, the Shulman family, who are not only the most dynamic but the most fertile in the Kirshner community—their sixth daughter is born in the novel's closing chapters—is Allegra Goodman's guarantee that American Orthodoxy will not remain static.

Struck by its context, reviewers have compared this book to the fiction of others who have written about the Orthodox milieu, from Chaim Potok to Pearl Abraham. But whereas most novels in this vein are still in effect discovering modernity, with some form of "progress" supplanting some form of Jewish "constraint," Allegra Goodman stands on the other side of acculturation, rediscovering the joy of limits. Most of her characters, whether Jewish or Gentile, must adjust to the losses they sustain, and the ones who adjust successfully are the ones who look for resolution within the status quo rather than making bids for expanding freedoms.

Yet that is not quite the whole story, either. Elizabeth Shulman's girls are called after their Hebrew names: Chani, Malki, Ruchel, Sorah, and Brocha. But their given names, we are carefully informed, are Annette, Margot, Rowena, Sabrina, and Bernice. Three weeks after giving birth to Chaya, her sixth, Elizabeth takes the infant to register her formally in the hospital as Celia.

As if to emulate her own heroine, Allegra Goodman does something similar by introducing each of the seven sections of her novel with a lush seasonal quotation drawn mostly from English and American literature. The opulence of these invocations—from Keats, Thoreau, Nicholas Breton, Samuel Johnson, Oscar Wilde, Edna St. Vincent Millay, and finally the Book of Psalms—does more than signal the time of year in which the action occurs. They situate the book beyond human nature, in God's universe,

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and they remind us of the proximity of the human world of Kaaterskill to the awe and grandeur of the Falls; of religion's clumsy but noble striving to imitate God; and of the American Jewish novel's humble place in the great chain of English literature. In this way, the novelist of manners endows self-discipline itself with a freedom, a spiritual largeness, it is not allowed to claim in its own name.

Who We Are

From Plato to NATO:
The Idea of the West and
Its Opponents
by David Gress
Free Press. 610 pages. $25.00

Reviewed by
Wilfred M. McClay

FOR YEARS now, we have been told by fashionable professors that ours is a postmodern age, an era in which every timeless "truth" has been proved relative and there is no longer any overarching meaning to be found in the record of human experience. But meanwhile, as if to flout the strictures of academic chic, the past few years have also seen an astonishing efflorescence of the now supposedly outlawed genre of "metanarratives," grand interpretations of the historical past. Writers as different as Thomas Sowell, David Landes, Paul Kennedy, Francis Fukuyama, Daniel Yergin, Norman Davies, Samuel Huntington, and Paul Johnson have given us big, influential works of wide scope and speculative ambition. Now the Danish-American historian David Gress has entered the lists with a metanarrative of his own—albeit one distinguished by its own distrust of metanarratives.

The title of Gress's book is meant to be taken with a grain of salt. By hitching together such disparate phenomena as Plato and NATO, he does not mean to poke fun at the idea of the West. Least of all does he wish to suggest any sympathy with postmodernists or other like-minded critics who are all too ready to denounce classical Greek philosophy and American cold-war policies in the same breath. What Gress really objects to is something else altogether: the way the West is usually *defended* by its most ardent partisans.

Not only, Gress argues, is it inaccurate to draw a simple line connecting the golden age of ancient Greece with our own liberal democracies, with stops along the way for such "magic moments" as the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. It is also self-defeating. As he sees it, only a more nuanced account, one that emphasizes not the irresistible march of ideas but the accidents and concrete reality of history, can answer the West's increasingly vocal critics.

GRESS'S *bête noire* is what he calls "the Grand Narrative," the heroic and inspiring story of the West's development as told in books like Will and Ariel Durant's multivolume middlebrow classic, *The Story of Civilization*. In this conception, which had its heyday during the first half of the 20th century, Western civilization has been a chugging engine of progressivism, always ascending in the direction of greater freedom, equality, and individual rights. From Pericles to Leonardo da Vinci to Diderot, Jefferson, and FDR, the West has been presented as a tightly scripted drama in which rational and enlightened notions about the dignity of man gradually triumph over the dark clouds of superstition and the dead hand of authority.

Despite its usefulness as a tool of highbrow propaganda, such a story, says Gress, is very misleading. For one thing, by exalting the modern values of secularism, individualism, and science, it gives short shrift to the West's distinctive religious faiths and institutions. Devotion to God, when mentioned at all, is cast as a transitional stage in the process of human maturation. But more importantly, by relying so heavily on the power of ideas, the Grand Narrative credits the West with far too much purity and idealism, thus leaving it open, when its practice fails to live up to its preaching, to the charges of arrogance and hypocrisy leveled by its radical detractors.

For the fate that has befallen it, the Grand Narrative itself, Gress maintains, is largely to blame. He has no patience with the many writers whose fairy-tale accounts of U.S. history celebrate our egalitarian principles while glossing over slavery, the decimation of the Indians, economic inequality, and other unsavory elements of our national past. Of course, he hastens to add, those who harp on the West's failings are hardly any less guilty of moralism and historical ignorance; far from it. But what both sides fail equally to see is that Western political and social freedom have arisen not through the sheer force of ideas but out of the crucible of real-world struggles in specific places at specific times.

What were those struggles? In Gress's revisionist account, the periods of particular importance are late antiquity and the Middle Ages. In these eras, which the Grand Narrative invariably presents as benighted counterpoints to the brilliance of ancient Greece, the classical legacy was fatefully reshaped by such wildly disparate forces as the late Roman empire, the medieval Church, and the freedom-loving Germanic tribes that eventually came to rule Europe. Gress uses the term "the Old West" to describe the peculiar premodern synthesis that emerged. Institutions we now regard as quintessentially Western—property rights and constitutional government, for example—grew out of the collision

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over centuries between empire-building rulers like Charlemagne and Charles V and the equally self-interested princes and churchmen who resisted their designs. But all this was in many respects a happy accident of history; it did not have to happen that way.

In Gress's judgment, a proper awareness of the contingent nature of our most cherished institutions, as well as of how much we owe to past historical experience, is not only sound analytic method but is itself a precious Western inheritance. That is no doubt why, in turning to more recent times, he finds intellectual allies among the members of the "skeptical" Enlightenment: figures like Hume, Montesquieu, Adam Smith, and the American founders, whose thought forms a strong contrast to the "radical" Enlightenment represented by Voltaire and Diderot. Though, like their French counterparts, the "skeptical" Enlighteners extolled the power of reason and firmly rejected the clericalism and imposed religious orthodoxy that were one legacy of the Old West, they also recognized the limits of human intellect and will. As a result, they were respectful of tradition, and appreciative of the degree to which the liberty they prized was dependent upon the customs and institutions of the past. Innovation, they taught, had to be balanced by inheritance.

This same sensibility, according to Gress, remains the best response to those who are forever ready to find fault with the shortcomings of the West. If the Grand Narrative created expectations that could not be met, a deeper understanding of the messy dialectic by which the West actually came into existence can teach both respect and vigilance. Against the often grim backdrop of history, Gress contends, the freedom and prosperity we enjoy in the West must be seen for what they are—a matchless but far from predetermined achievement.

IN TELLING his epic tale, Gress covers a truly impressive amount of historical ground, from the Bible and the *Song of Roland* to contemporary debates over global warming and economic growth. His interpretations are almost always highly intelligent, and are offered with an intellectual panache that few academic historians now permit themselves. At the same time, however, *From Plato to NATO* is a sprawling and rather convoluted book. Gress devotes far too much space to rehearsing academic debates and counterpunching against other historians, and thus fails to tell his story as directly and concretely as one would wish.

A more serious problem is that the Grand Narrative against which Gress argues so energetically is something of a straw man. Like other contemporary historians—like, in fact, the more radical critics of the West—Gress exaggerates the degree to which scholars earlier in this century were uncritical celebrants of the Western tradition. Certainly, to give one example, the outstanding books about America produced in that period by such writers as Henry Nash Smith, Perry Miller, Richard Hofstadter, and Louis Hartz show a keen awareness of the antinomies and tragic imperfections of American life. Theirs was hardly a fairy-tale version of the nation's past.

Finally, one is left to wonder why an author who seeks to recast our view of the West should be so relentlessly and severely critical of the independent power of ideas, and of their ability to function as historical causes in their own right. Is not the vision of the West that Gress sets forth itself an idea? Does not this book illustrate, more powerfully than anything Gress himself says, the belief that ideas matter historically? And if they matter today, why not in the past as well?

What is perhaps most regrettable about Gress's strange hostility to ideas is that it detracts from his valuable recommendation that the West's defenders turn their attention to history. This need is especially urgent, he rightly recognizes, with respect to the West's religious traditions, which our liberal elites—partisans of the Grand Narrative or not—continue to treat as a nagging atavism or a juvenile way station along the path to enlightened adulthood.

Though Gress's treatment of religion is far from perfect—most notably, the Jews are present in his account only as a wholly owned subsidiary of Christianity or as the hapless objects of anti-Semitism—he well understands the key role that communities of faith have played in establishing the boundaries of Western liberty. As he convincingly shows, militant secularism is at best an unsteady friend of rights or order. At its most extreme, in the French and Russian Revolutions, it has led to atrocities. In our own day, it has cleared the way for moral pathologies too numerous to name, and has brought the power of the state into realms that are previously considered private sanctuaries.

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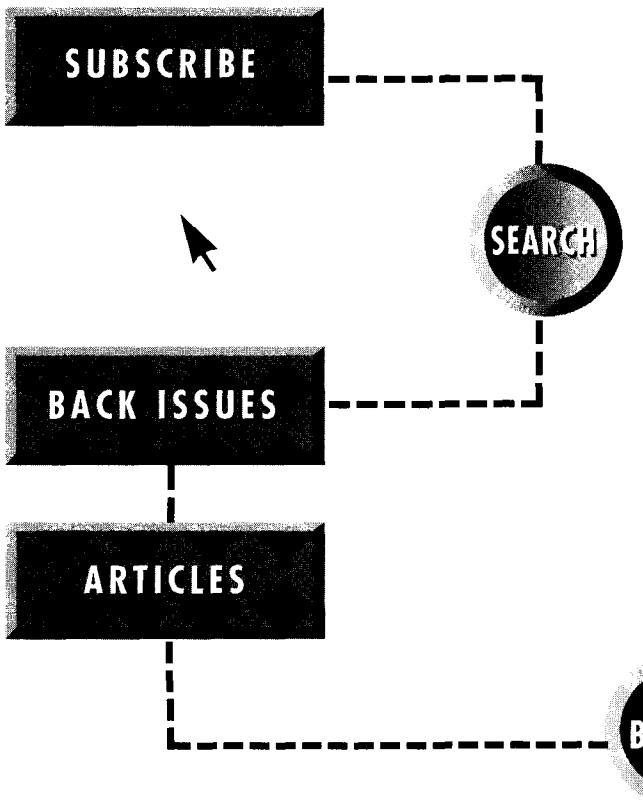

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For reminding us so forcefully of these and other crucial historical lessons, David Gress deserves considerable credit. Whatever its flaws, his rich and suggestive book has much to contribute to today's often woefully ill-informed debates over the past and future of Western civilization.

Final Respects

Saying Kaddish:
How to Comfort the Dying,
Bury the Dead,
and Mourn as a Jew
by Anita Diamant
Schocken. 265 pp. $23.00

Kaddish
by Leon Wieseltier
Knopf. 588 pp. $27.50

Reviewed by
Jon D. Levenson

THE KADDISH, a prayer now associated with mourning and the commemoration of the departed, maintains a grip on the Jewish psyche that one would not have expected on the basis of its relative unimportance in the classical rabbinic liturgy. But beginning in the early Middle Ages, the kaddish—whose text makes no mention of death whatsoever, but rather is devoted to magnifying and sanctifying the name of God—increasingly assumed a career of its own, accumulating a rich store of theological notions about the dead and the obligations of the living to them. Later on, a large body of *halakhic* (legal) discussion developed, precisely regulating when, how, by whom, and for whom the kaddish was to be recited. The history of this deceptively simple doxology thus sheds light on major facets of Jewish belief, practice, and folklore.

Anita Diamant's and Leon Wieseltier's books arose out of the same event—the death of the author's father. The two volumes, however, are exceedingly different. As its subtitle indicates, Diamant's (to begin there) is a "how-to" book on death and mourning from a Jewish perspective. Her approach is primarily psychological, and her focus is less on the demands of Jewish tradition than on the personal needs of the contemporary Jew.

Diamant goes out of her way to underline that her book is directed to those "non-Orthodox Jews—Conservative, Reconstructionist, Reform, and unaffiliated—who tend to view *halakhah* as reference point and guide rather than mandate." Unfortunately, at no point does she inquire into the difference between the values underlying *halakhah* and those underlying the religious calculus of the "non-Orthodox Jews" she wants to reach. As a result, although her book demonstrates admirable compassion and offers considerable assistance to those dealing with terminal illness and death, it does not challenge its readers to think deeply about their tradition or about what it might mean to act in accordance with it.

Not that Diamant neglects altogether to indicate what the classical norms prescribe. Rather, she is unable to provide criteria as to when they should be followed and when overridden, leaving the impression that the decision between Jewish religious law and secular convention is strictly a matter of personal preference:

> Listening to music during *shiva* [the first and most intense week of mourning] is prohibited by Jewish law because music is associated with happiness or used for distraction. But many people use music to focus on their grief. Listening to a loved one's favorite song or symphony can be comforting, or painful, or both.

"Prohibited," "comforting," "painful," "comforting" *and* "painful"—what is a Jew to do?

Diamant's theology is equally squishy. "There is not now, nor has there ever been, one unified doctrinal Jewish view of the afterlife," she writes. "Jews have embraced the gamut of beliefs about what happens to human beings after they die." This is true enough in a way, but what "Jews have embraced" and what Judaism demands are two very different things; Jews have embraced idol worship, too. From Diamant's wording, one would never guess that belief in the resurrection of the dead was a mandatory and defining tenet of the Pharisaic and rabbinic traditions from which modern Judaism descends, and a major affirmation of the traditional liturgy. Once again, the contemporary Jew is left to choose for himself, with only the dubious consolation that, whatever he chooses, other Jews may have already chosen it as well. Surely the rabbinic tradition, even if it is to be "a reference point and guide rather than mandate," offers more than this.

IN CONTRAST to Anita Diamant, Leon Wieseltier, the literary editor of the *New Republic*, focuses on the history, theology, and *halakhah* surrounding the kaddish. But his book, erudite and rich in historical reference, is not a scholarly inquiry. It is, rather, a journal, full of meditations and aphorisms, of the eleven months of mourning during which Wieseltier recited the doxology at each of the three daily services, just as the tradition requires. As for the aphorisms, they can at times be striking—"In religious life, habit is essential. In spiritual life, habit is shameful"—but the cryptic style and the overheated prose in which they

JON D. LEVENSON *is the Albert A. List professor of Jewish studies at Harvard and the author, most recently, of* The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son: The Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity *(Yale) and* Esther: A Commentary *(Westminster John Knox).*

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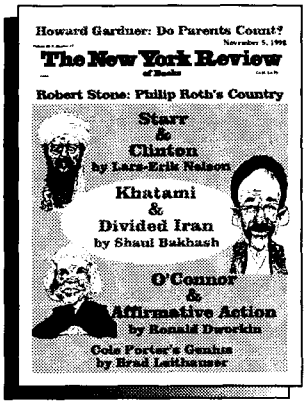

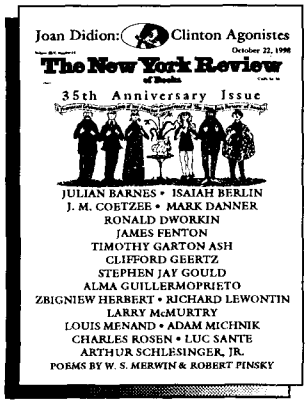

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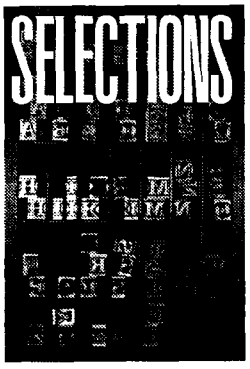

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are couched often leave the impression of mere posturing or a reaching for effect.

Despite its autobiographical and discontinuous format, *Kaddish*, the work of an author who is himself the product of an Orthodox childhood and education, sheds considerable light on the legacy of classical Judaism and on the existential issues raised by traditional understandings of the kaddish. Wieseltier chronicles the stages by which the prayer became most closely associated with mourning and, more importantly, investigates the meaning not only of mourning but of death and afterlife in the Jewish context. Finally, he considers the nature of tradition itself and its enduring, if problematic, claim on modern man.

Here, however, is the rub. For Anita Diamant, Judaism's proper partner in dialogue—and the source of the most intense challenge to its precepts—is modern psychology. Wieseltier will have none of this. Things that are "emotionally true," he writes, do not interest him: "truth is not an emotion." For him, it is not psychology but philosophy—the "most beautiful word in the language"—that must be Judaism's partner in dialogue.

Yet the actual *content* of philosophy in Wieseltier's parlance remains vague. Does the "most beautiful word in the language" refer to philosophy in the medieval sense, complete with the assumption that religious tradition has its origin in divine revelation and is thus possessed of a continuing normative status? Or is it more like philosophy in the Enlightenment sense, eager to found itself upon universal reason alone and skeptical of all claims of historical revelation and of the authority of sacred books and tradition?

If the former, then philosophy and religion are, as Wieseltier himself briefly reflects, natural allies. But if the latter, then philosophy is anything but the ally of religion. For as is well known, philosophy in the Enlightenment sense has devoted itself largely to debunking traditional beliefs as well as the rituals that are sustained by those beliefs and that sustain them in turn. Given Wieseltier's daily attendance in synagogue during the year of mourning for his father, one might expect him to be reclaiming and reasserting the medieval understanding of philosophy. In fact, he is highly ambivalent about the philosophical defense of traditional religion, and this ambivalence robs his arguments of the depth they seem to promise.

UNLIKE DIAMANT, who is satisfied to interpret Jewish mourning rituals in terms of their effects on the living, Wieseltier struggles throughout his book with the unpalatable reality that rabbinic tradition has often seen these rituals as benefiting the *dead*, by diminishing the severity and duration of their punishment in Gehenna (the netherworld). In his more respectful moments, he turns his passion for philosophy to uncovering the truth that resides in myth:

> It occurs to me today . . . that the rabbinical doctrines about death and the afterlife have the consequence of preempting any idea of predestination. In this way, they protect the fiction of the ethical life. In the absence of all these posthumous ordeals, reward and punishment would be utterly mechanical: goodness moves up, badness moves down, all with a monstrous inexorability. But goodness and badness are almost never unmixed, since the heart is hungry and the will is free. It is human complexity for which the myth of judgment allows.

At other times, however, his skeptical streak coming to the fore, he categorically denies the central rabbinic doctrines of the afterlife on which so much of the theology and folklore of the kaddish depend, and even brands the very idea of a prayer for the dead "a pious absurdity": "The dead are dead. They will not wake." At these moments one feels the intractable anguish of a highly knowledgeable Jew resolved to honor his father as his Orthodox upbringing requires but unable to affirm the theology associated with the rites that, as he says elsewhere, he is "bound by love and by duty to follow."

And so he vacillates. "What about the mourner who has a secret sympathy for the preacher [i.e., the author of the book of Ecclesiastes], the mourner . . . for whom death is oblivion?" Wieseltier asks, going on to say, portentously, "I am such a mourner." For that mourner, he has an answer of his own: "I cannot be sure that my kaddish for my father is proof of his immortality. I can be sure that it is proof of his posterity." For "[p]osterity is the version of immortality that reason can accept, that tradition can count on."

But to the classical Jewish sources, including the philosophical sources, immortality is not, in fact, an offense to reason. It would be interesting—it would be exceedingly fruitful—to ask, why not? But Wieseltier does not pause to consider the unspoken tenets of his own skepticism about the afterlife, or to consider why the premodern tradition does not adhere to them. This is all the odder coming from one who repeatedly delivers himself of ringing denunciations of philosophical materialism, physicalism, and scientism—all deeply implicated in modern skepticism about immortality. One expects a writer in love with philosophy to examine his presuppositions critically: Wieseltier's failure in this regard makes it seem that behind the confessional and aphoristic mode he is hiding from serious interrogation of his own thoughts.

During his year of synagogue attendance, Wieseltier did exemplary service in the role of a dutiful son honoring the memory of his father in a manner consonant with the father's own identity as a traditional East European Jew. But whatever

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the relationship of the two men may have been in life—and at this, Wieseltier only hints—his family's religious tradition and his own Orthodox education seem to weigh on him so heavily that at times he comes across more as their victim than as their beneficiary: "I will never be free of the framework. Never." Looking to justify his anomalous stance, he resorts to arguments that sound as if lifted verbatim from some still-running transcript of adolescent rebellion: "If you do not accept the legacy, the ones who come after you cannot resent it, tinker with it, reject it. By what right do you rob them of the pleasures that you enjoyed?" Or, again: "If you deny the authority of heaven, then why are you shaking your fist at it?" The unresolved pathos of the Jew for whom "philosophy" (in the modern sense) is the most beautiful word in the language has seldom been better stated.

In the Dark

Secrecy:
The American Experience
by Daniel Patrick Moynihan
Yale. 320 pp. $22.50

Reviewed by
Richard Perle

BETWEEN CAMPUS and caucus, Daniel Patrick Moynihan has combined a long career in politics and diplomacy with impressive intellectual accomplishments—eighteen books, countless articles, and truly original work in social science and public policy.

Secrecy in government, its use and abuse, is one subject about which Moynihan has thought deeply and has much to say. His new book is an engaging, sometimes rambling, often anecdotal work analyzing both the mechanics of secrecy—its rules, procedures, and personnel—and the effects of our government's "culture of secrecy" on public discourse.

Moynihan treats secrecy as a form of regulation, though one that differs from the usual type in prescribing not "what the citizen may do" but "what the citizen may know." He takes up questions posed by the system of security clearances, which determine who can gain access to what information, and examines the changing number of "classification authorities" in U.S. government—that is, officials who have the power to declare a document off-limits by marking it with a stamp or labeling it with a codeword. But his real aim is to show how the fear of espionage in World War I, the rise of American Communism in the 1930's, the rigors of World War II, and in particular the development of atomic weapons set in motion forces that have transformed a "governmental system that valued openness over secrecy" into a "vast secrecy system that shows no sign of receding."

Secrecy, according to Moynihan, has become "our characteristic mode of governance in the executive branch." Though he acknowledges that a nation's effort to protect itself must necessarily involve concealing things, his contention is that we have lost the necessary balance between secrecy and the right of the public to know. He traces this imbalance to the cold war, when, he writes, secrecy was routinized and bureaucratized to an unprecedented degree—so much so that it ironically ended up helping the American Left escape the unwelcome truth that there *were* Soviet spies and agents in departments of the U.S. government.

What Moynihan is referring to is the recently revealed fact that U.S. Army intelligence had broken coded Soviet messages, including the "Venona" cables, confirming the activities of alleged Soviet spies like the Rosenbergs and Alger Hiss. But, he says, even President Truman was never told about this, let alone the American public. How, he laments, could our government have allowed us to tear each other apart in the 1950's over such issues as the independence of the American Communist movement, or the innocence of Alger Hiss, when it knew all along, because it had decrypted the secret cables, that the Communist party *was* subordinated to Moscow, and Hiss *was* guilty?

Curiously, Moynihan, a former vice chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, does not pause to wonder whether Washington might have had good reason to conceal its success in deciphering the Soviet codes. Although one would like to know what lies behind his thinking here, he never tells us. Nor do we learn anything more about his breathtaking revelation that even President Truman was kept in the dark about the decryptions. Can this be true? Or is there some meta-secret of which Moynihan, too, remains ignorant?

WHATEVER THE answers to these particular puzzles, Moynihan is surely right to deplore the excessive veil of secrecy that has been drawn over much intelligence information and research. He argues persuasively that this shields intelligence officers from much-needed debate and criticism, and allows errors of fact or judgment to go unchallenged. He knows well from his own experience—on the White House staff, in diplomatic posts at home and abroad, and in the United States Senate—how secrets can function as a source of power for the bureaucrats who possess them, and how, in consequence, they are often hoarded when they should be disseminated, or traded like currency when they should be freely shared.

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Moynihan knows other things as well: that systems for the classification of secret material can be manipulated to prevent officials from performing their duties, and that secrecy carries costs—of which policy failure is only one—that are often underestimated. But there are also things he does not know, even if he is full of mischievous speculation about them.

One of these things is the nature and significance of the CIA's colossal failure to arrive at an accurate assessment of Soviet power throughout much of the cold war. As Moynihan puts it, the "secrecy system . . . prevented American government from accurately assessing the enemy and then dealing rationally with them." Or, in the words of the historian Richard Gid Powers in his lengthy and quite cloying introduction to this book:

> [T]he most baleful consequences of the cold war—the fissure in American culture that developed during the McCarthy period and the fathomless debts accumulated during the arms build-up of the Reagan years—could have been avoided had it not been for the secrecy that concealed from the American people what the government knew and what it did not know.

In developing his case, Moynihan focuses in particular on the CIA's inflated estimates of Soviet economic power—estimates which, he writes, adversely affected our policy and had damaging long-term consequences. "What if," he asks in one wistful passage, "the United States had noticed Soviet weakness earlier on and accordingly kept its own budget in order, so that upon the break-up of the Soviet Union a momentous economic aid program could have commenced?"

There can be no doubt that the CIA seriously and consistently overestimated the size, rate of growth, and potential of the Soviet economy. In 1958, the agency took the view that Soviet gross domestic product (GDP) was growing much faster than ours, and would come within 50 percent of ours by 1962. This was ludicrous, as was the CIA estimate in 1990 that the Soviet GDP stood at $2.5 trillion. (Michael Boskin, then the chairman of the President's Council of Economic Advisers, gave the much lower estimate of $1.6 trillion.) As Moynihan rightly observes, any casual visitor to Moscow would have seen more than enough of the appalling circumstances in which most Soviet citizens lived to cast doubt on the plausibility of the CIA's view.

The mistake of the CIA analysts was to rely on Soviet statistics. They were skeptical of those statistics, of course, but they refused or were unable to accept the magnitude of the lies being told, and so the adjustments they applied were woefully off. The clear implication of Moynihan's argument, however, is that were it not for the culture of secrecy, such wild inaccuracies would never have gone unchallenged. The reality is otherwise.

With very few exceptions, the community of academic Soviet specialists and international economists *agreed* with the CIA analysts. (Moynihan fails to recall that his Harvard colleague John Kenneth Galbraith had confidently predicted the "convergence" of the U.S. and Soviet economies.) Those who disagreed with this view, and who have subsequently been proved right, were isolated within the intelligence/policy community and largely scorned in academic circles.

The economy was only one measure of Soviet power; the other was its military capability. Here, too, Moynihan suggests, the CIA made the USSR out to be more powerful than it was. But this is not so; if anything, the intelligence community made it out to be *less* powerful than it was. Indeed, during George Bush's tenure as director of the CIA, a group of independent outside experts—"Team B"—was assembled to examine the accuracy of CIA estimates in this area. The team concluded that the agency had significantly underestimated most elements of Soviet military power, including even such a key measure as the accuracy of Soviet nuclear missiles.* Moynihan, who rightly complains that the culture of secrecy blocks competing and potentially corrective analysis, makes no mention of this landmark exception to the rule.

The combination of overestimating Soviet economic performance and underestimating Soviet military power produced a grossly distorted view of the staggering burden to which Soviet citizens were subjected by a succession of regimes plowing 30 to 35 percent of GDP into the military. (Official CIA estimates hovered between 9 and 12 percent.) This was the most serious intelligence failure of all, and it had profound consequences for the conduct of American policy. They are, however, exactly the opposite of the consequences Moynihan points to.

The failure to understand how thin the Soviets were stretched led directly to faulty judgments about arms control, a subject to which Moynihan attaches extravagant importance. There were those (including in the CIA) who pushed for generous terms for the Soviets in our negotiations with them on these matters; the reasoning was that, without arms-control treaties to hold them back, the Soviets would surge forward with massive new weapons programs in an effort to catch up with us. The opposite view was championed most vigorously by the late Senator Henry "Scoop" Jackson, joined by such "hard-liners" as Zbigniew Brzezinski, Richard Pipes, Andrew Marshall, Henry Rowen, Albert Wohlstetter, and William Lee. They pressed for a tougher negotiating position, on the grounds that the

* See "Team B: The Reality Behind the Myth" by Richard Pipes, who served as chairman of the group (Commentary, October 1986).

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Soviets were already spending, and developing and deploying weapons, at or very near the limit of their capacity, and should be given no help in pursuing their aggressive aims. The latter view was right.

FINALLY, MOYNIHAN believes that a more accurate picture of just how weak the Soviet Union was might have dissuaded Ronald Reagan from spending so heavily on the American military and thus incurring those "fathomless debts" of which Richard Gid Powers speaks. This misses the essential point of the Reagan strategy.

Reagan understood exactly how weak the Soviets were, both economically and politically. But he also knew how massively they had invested in military power and, in this area alone, how much strength they still exhibited. He set about rebuilding America's military forces not through reckless expenditures—it is absurd to attribute the debt accumulated in the Reagan years solely or even largely to military spending—but through a measured modernization of obsolete systems and by launching the Strategic Defense Initiative. Even former Soviet officials have confirmed that this program—together, crucially, with Reagan's political challenge to the legitimacy of Soviet rule—was instrumental in ending the cold war with an American victory.

Reagan's was a bold strategy, and quite different from the policy that had prevailed during much of the postwar period. It flowed from a far keener appreciation of the Soviet Union than the one the President got from his intelligence services—which, with all their secrets, counseled accommodation and détente. Moynihan, who knows a great deal, should know that, too.

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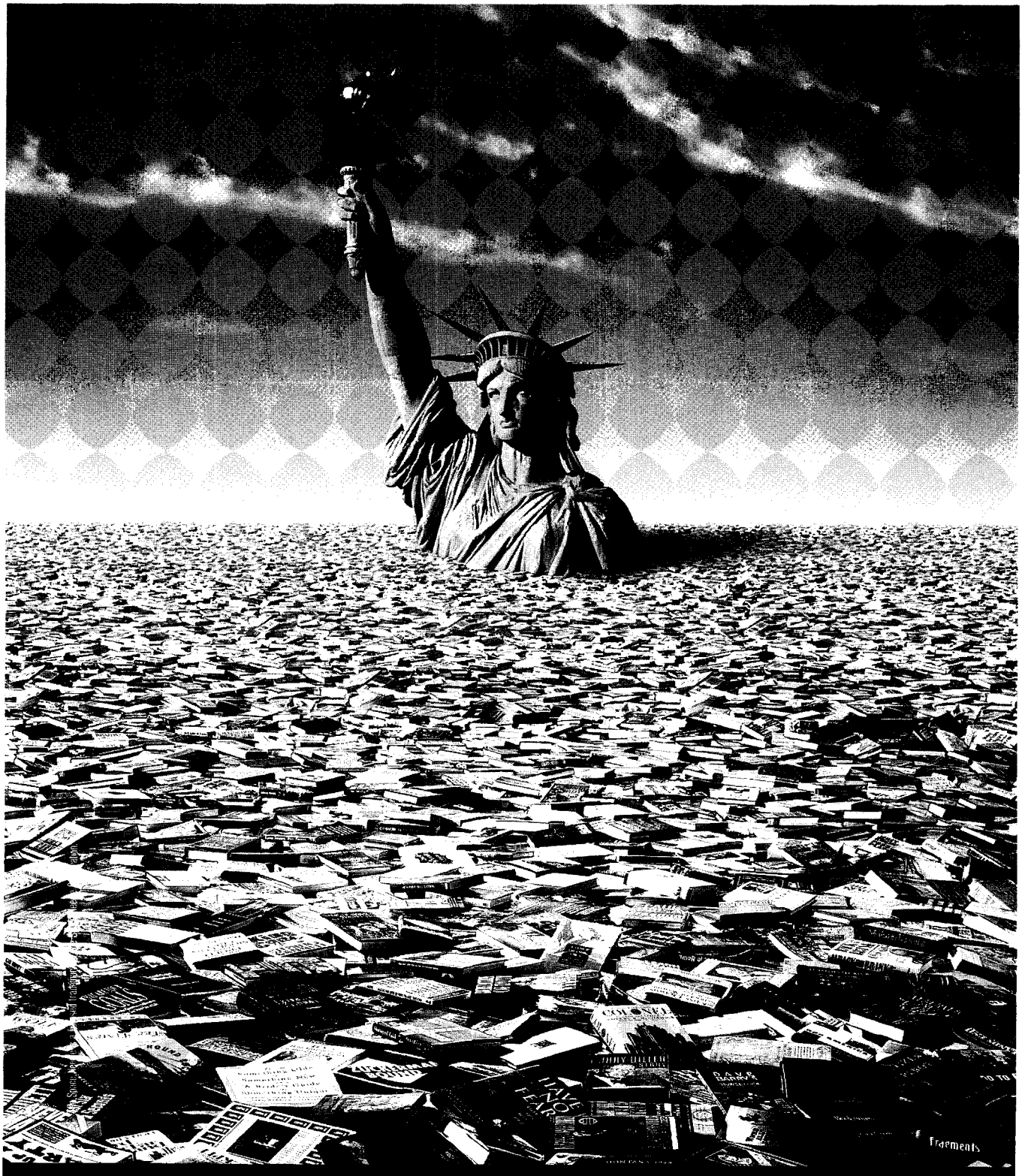

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